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A GIRL WITH A FORTUNE

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF "DEAR LADY DISDAIN," "MISS MISANTHROPE,"
"A HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES," ETC.

A NEW EDITION

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CAMIOLA.

CHAPTER I.

FITZURSEHAM.

A CHURCH and churchyard stand on the edge of a broad river. The waters of the stream wash the outer wall of the churchyard when the tide is full, or even half full; and sometimes in the stormy days of winter and spring the waves toss themselves far over the wall, and sport and splash among the quiet tombs and hillocks of the dead. The visitor who looks over the low wall across the river and sees the heavy boats with their white or dark-red sails floating lazily past, or if the tide be low a strip of shore beneath him with rusty anchors lying on it, and the hulks of ancient craft stranded high and dry, is apt for the moment to be charmed by the mere sensuous beauty of the scene into sheer forgetfulness of the associations with graves, and death, and man's sad transitory career, which are proper to the paths and the mounds just behind him. The church itself is a Georgian structure, with a square brick tower, and the tower surmounted by a conical spire of copper, painted by time and weather a dull green, and with a vane on the top. A pillared portico shelters the church doors. At least one famous tomb is to be seen in the interior; the monument of a great man whose career of activity was strangely cut off before his life had reached anything like its middle period. On a bright summer day, or, perhaps better still, on some soft sweet melancholy day of early autumn, a visitor blest with any sense of the picturesque who lounges in that lonely churchyard, has a dreamy and delightful time of it. His enjoyment is not likely to be much disturbed. He may lounge there long and often enough without meeting any other lounger. Taken on the whole, church, churchyard, and river, it is not easy to imagine a scene more interesting and more suggestive of picturesque association. Yet it hardly ever happens that any one drops in to have a look at the place; though it lies on the banks of the Thames, and if you lean a little forward over the churchyard wall and turn to your right you can on any day of reasonably clear atmosphere, have a good sight of the towers of Westminster Palace and the dome of St. Paul's.

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Behind the church lies a town—it is not quite easy to say whether it ought to be called a town or only a suburb of London. It is not really outside the four-mile radius, and it is certain that you can walk from the old church right into Trafalgar-square without a single breach of continuity as regards streets and houses. Yet it seems unreasonable to describe the place as a suburb of London. It has an existence all its own, and London absolutely ignores that existence. It is a forlorn place altogether. Modern ways have not touched it; the prosperity of the capital has given it no share. Geographically it is an easy walk from Charing Cross; morally and socially it is hundreds of miles and several generations away from the life of London. It is intensely interesting in a sort of way; it has the picturesqueness of decay and failure and utterly hopeless prostration. Grass grows in the principal thoroughfares; whole rows of houses are to let. Ancient mansions, which look as if they had a curse upon them, fall into green-moulded ruin behind great high enclosing walls. Some of these may have been, probably must have been, the dwellings of high and mighty personages in days of yore; in the days, perhaps, when the cause of the Stuarts yet had hopes, and victims, and heroes. Now they are tenantless, and nobody seems to mind or to take any account of them. It would be curious to know what would happen if somebody were quietly to settle down as an occupant in one of them; were to light fires in the musty old grates, and bring a besom to bear on the spider-draped windows. Would any authorized caretaker come to interfere with him; to ask him what he was doing there; to raise the question of ownership and rent? My impression is that nothing of the kind would happen; that the venturesome squatter might squat and no soul interfere to disturb him.

The whole place might be likened to the point at which the buckets meet in a mine-shaft, one going up, the other coming down. Its occupants were those who were just beginning a career in the world, and those who, having attempted one and failed, were slowly, steadily, going down to re-appear no more. Settled respectability of whatever condition in life had nothing to do with this strange, dreary, fascinating region. The very greengrocers who permanently occupied houses there were a seedy and ruinous lot. A spirited costermonger beginning with a donkey and cart and hawking his vegetables from door to door of these streets and roads, looked out with courage and confidence to the day when he should quit the place for ever and start a greengrocery in some more auspicious quarter. The ambition of every healthy-minded pot boy, baker's boy, and servant-of-all-work was to get out of the neighbourhood and set up in some more thriving spot. On the other hand, the ruined and broken, the defeated and disconsolate, sought the place as if attracted thither by some natural affinity or supernatural charm. It drew them towards it as the enchanted mountain of loadstone in the "Arabian Nights" drew to itself all the bolts and nails out of the approaching ships. Perhaps one

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natural explanation of this was that rents were very low in this forlorn quarter, and that there were plenty of houses always empty to choose from. Some lunatics had from time to time ventured on running up new rows of buildings in the blighted, swampy fields, under the impression, perhaps, that an entirely uncalled for supply might possibly create an unnatural demand; and the laws of political economy still prevailing, the building speculation came to its predestined end. Nothing was changed; there was one bankrupt the more. These houses, then, were always available for new tenants, always making silent, mournful appeal to some one to come and take them. Many of them looked spacious and alluring to the broken and poverty-stricken refugee who sought cheap shelter in this Alsatia of the destitute. When the refugee had installed himself in one of them the ceilings immediately began to crumble and fall about his ears; the floors gave way; the balustrades lost in numbers; the rain leaked through the jerry-constructed roofs. The refugee took no trouble; perhaps even took no thought. Such occurrences were but incidents in his downward career. To what end making complaint or insisting on repairs? Perhaps when the time came to pay his quarter's or half-year's rent he might not be in a position to speak with his enemy, the rent-collecter, at the gate. It would be better for him at such a time and under such conditions that he had not given any trouble about leaking roofs and falling plaster.

No theory that the wit of man could suggest would satisfactorily account for the existence of such a place in such close neighbourhood to the greatest metropolis of the world. Nor can we attempt to explain why it is that every second shop in the less silent streets —there are no busy streets—should be a shop for the sale of fried fish. Even if the population were to live upon fried fish, there would hardly be so many shops needed to distribute the supply. There are some odd, ancient, beetle-browed public-houses with red-tiled roofs which make one long to go in and drink beer in pure homage to their old English picturesqueness. There is, for example, the Old Ferry Inn. This hostelry is approached from the landward side like any ordinary tavern; except, indeed, that the visitor has to dive two or three steps before he finds himself on a level with its bar. It is one of the ancient wooden houses which used to be so common along the Thames, and which are now gradually disappearing, going out one by one like the fading lamps in an old-fashioned illumination. But the interest of the house is in its approach from the river. A boat brings one to a flight of stone steps leading straight down to the stream; you step out as you would from a gondola at the door of a Venetian palace. When you mount the stone steps you come to a sort of ledge or terrace on which you perceive on your right a flight of wooden steps running, or tottering would be the right word, up to the top of a wall. If you mount these you come to a wooden platform which is contrived on the top of the wall surrounding the garden of the

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Old Ferry Inn; and from that platform another flight of steps descending takes you into the garden behind and beneath the wall. There, if the weather be fine, you may sit at little wooden tables on a wooden chair, and smoke your pipe and drink your beer, should you be so inclined. If the weather be not fine you can shelter yourself in the house, which is comfortable enough in its way. The public-house is the one institution which never seems to fall into utter disuse among us, or, even in the most miserable regions, to lack business and fail to make money. When the lights shone on the cold river from the red-curtained windows of the Old Ferry Inn, on some gusty night in December, it was enough to tempt the wayfarer, who approached from the bridge or landed from a boat, to spend his last penny for the privilege of a temporary shelter in so cheerful a retreat.

It will be seen that there was a good deal to be said in just disparagement of the region we have been describing. There was one charge, however, which no enemy could bring against it; no man could say that it was commonplace. A certain class of author or artist would have loved the place. The painter would have seen a picture in every muddy lane that crept to the river; the author would have found a story in every ancient tenement that was settling down into decrepitude. Such historic associations as the place had were bound up with the family history of the great man whose tomb was made in the church by the water. All manner of odd endowments and foundations bore the name of some member of that gifted and eccentric house whose fame reached its loudest with this one great man, and then was no further renewed. The family had become extinct, its title appeared no more on the roll of English peers, although the name of the family was still borne by one or two persons in the place who were made conspicuous by it, for it was not an English name to begin with. It had been brought into England long ago, and its sound tells of its origin. The family name of the great man whose memory still clings to the spot was Fitzurse. As we have to give the place itself a name, for the sake of convenience we may as well call it Fitzurseham.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. POLLEN.

THE church, the churchyard, the boats, the old inn with its stone steps, were well appreciated by the keen and observant eyes of Mrs. Isabel Pollen, who saw them for the first time on a beautiful tender afternoon of early summer.

Mrs. Pollen was a widow who might still be called young; she was certainly under forty, and she would have been called handsome by many. She had full dark eyes, and a face which sometimes looked sensuous and sometimes moody and thoughtful. She had been the wife of a self-made rich and vulgar man, whom she

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detested and despised while he was living. He died suddenly while she was absent, and she was stricken with a wild remorse because she had not loved him. He had left her all his property and his money and she was immensely rich, and childless. After his death she had spent some time in Jerusalem trying to find peace of mind there, and now at last she had come back to England with one or two set purposes of atonement to the memory of her husband. It was somehow borne in upon her one night in Jerusalem that if she went back to England she would find that Mr. Pollen had some neglected relatives about whose existence he had never told her, and to whom, perhaps, she could show some kindness if they stood in need of it, and do some permanent good. When she got to London in pursuit of this fancy, it was easy enough to find from Mr. Pollen's lawyers and agents some information to put her on a track. She had never, while he was living, taken the slightest interest in his affairs, or encouraged any confidence from him. She now found that he was born somewhere in the Fitzurseham region; that he had from time to time bought houses there; that he had become the owner of Fitzurse House, once the stately mansion of the old family, but more lately turned to the purposes of an institution or foundation of some kind, and which, as the lease was now just about to fall in, might be in her hands almost at any moment. Nothing was known of any relations Mr. Pollen might have had, if he had any surviving; but assuredly Fitzurseham was the natural place to look for them. So Mrs. Pollen resolved to undertake her wild-goose chase. Her idea was odd and fanciful; but she was an odd and fanciful woman, with strange sudden insights, altogether unusual powers of observation, quick succeeding gusts of generosity, self-sacrifice, cynicism, despondency, self-disdain, and a mind absolutely indifferent to the conventionalities of society and social life anywhere. Her idea was to study Fitzurseham for herself; to find out if Mr. Pollen had any surviving relatives, to try to make them good if they were bad; to try to make them happy if they were good; to help them to bring out whatever was auspicious in them, and, if possible, to find children for her adoption among them. She began her work in the very quietest and most commonplace way. She was staying in a hotel in one of the streets off Piccadilly. She took a cab to Westminster Pier, went up the river in one of the steamers, and made her way to Fitzurse House. Arrived there she had nothing to do but to ask for the person in charge of it. Mrs. Pollen never settled upon any immediate details in any plan of action until she had some personal knowledge of those with whom she had to deal.

"I can't begin until I see what sort of person he is," she thought to herself. "He ought not to be a prosaic or commonplace sort of person in such a spot and with such a name."

The caretaker bore the odd name of Christian Pilgrim, and he certainly was not commonplace to look at. He was a strongly built square-shouldered, stooping man, with a complexion worse than

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pallid; something greenish in its tone, and with snow-white hair, although his movements were those of manhood's most vigorous time. His dark-grey eyes had a short-sighted and wandering look about them. He wore an old black velvet coat, and might have passed for a broken-down artist in the days when artists still wore velvet coats.

"Just the man for the place," Mrs. Pollen thought, as he opened the door in answer to her knock. "Sees ghosts and lives in a dream. He will help me." She introduced herself in a few clear words, her loud, strong, contralto voice seeming to startle the quiet loneliness of the place. He made his answers in a low and deliberate tone, speaking each word as precisely as if he were spelling it, and with the constrained manner of one who has to use something like force with himself to keep his attention from wandering.

"I don't particularly care to see the house just yet, Mr. Pilgrim. I would rather transact my business out-of-doors, if you don't mind."

"As you please, madame."

"You are not much of a business man, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"No, madame, I regret to say."

"Do you? I don't; I am glad of it."

Fitzurse House was a long, low, early Georgian building, such as might have suited a wealthy squire who had a somewhat more refined taste than most of his neighbours. It was large, and had a great many rooms; but it had only two storeys; two rows of formal oblong windows, and a large door with wide semi-circular fanlight. The front of the house was almost covered with ivy and creepers of various kinds. The lawn was smoothly shaven, and set round with cedars and elms and poplars and copper beech. Mrs. Pollen's quick eye noted with satisfaction that there were no forlorn statues or plaster-casts turning green and mouldy in the unfavouring open air of English spring and winter. It was not Mrs. Pollen's opinion that a heathen goddess wearing nothing but patches of rotting moss is a becoming ornament of an English garden.

"No woman lives here?" Mrs. Pollen said quietly.

"In this house, madame?"

"Yes; I mean you have no woman servants; I am told that you are unmarried—I beg pardon; that you have not a wife."

"May I ask, madame, why you corrected what you first said?"

"About being unmarried? Yes, certainly. I was under the impression that you were a bachelor; but I saw from your look, when I spoke of you as unmarried, that mine was a mistaken impression. I am sorry if I have pained you in any way by my words. You see that I myself——" And she stopped short, and made a kind of gesture towards her crape-encumbered dress.

"May I ask again, madame, why you came to the conclusion that there are no women living in the house?"

"Oh, well, I think any one could tell that at a glance—any woman, at least, if she had eyes in her head, and knew how to use

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them. For one thing, there would be little attempts at ornament here and there, don't you know—plaster-casts and things; busts of the Royal Family, and Clytie, and bits of rockeries, and so forth; and then again those picturesque fallen leaves, blown down by last week's winds, would never be left to beautify that path—fallen before their time, like young conscripts killed in their first battle. Oh no, they would be all swept away with the broom of remorseless cleanliness. Yes, I understand these matters, I can assure you."

Mr. Pilgrim thought he had to do with a remarkably keen-eyed sort of person. He began even to feel a little uncomfortable under the inspection of her large, dark, encompassing eyes. They seemed to involve him and surround him completely in every glance.

"I'll sit here," said Mrs. Pollen. There were a few wooden seats standing about; she took one of them, and pointed to another. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Thank you, madame; I had rather stand."

"All right. Now, I suppose you are curious to know what I have to talk to you about?"

"As you have wished to speak to me——"

"Exactly; as I wished to speak to you, of course I must have something to talk to you about. Did you ever in your life know a woman who came to the point of anything directly and at once? Come, did you ever?"

"Well, I really don't quite know."

"I do; you never did know such a woman; because you never before knew me. I am unlike other women in this, and I fondly hope in other matters too; I come to the point when I have anything to say. Yes; I know what you are thinking of quite well; you are saying to yourself that I am not coming directly to the point now. That is what you were thinking of."

"It is. I don't know how you guessed it, madame."

"I didn't guess it; I saw it in your looks just as plainly as if it had been in print; but you are wrong, all the same. I *am* coming to some point in every word I say, only you don't see it, and I don't want you to see it—just yet, at any rate. Well, what do you suppose I have come to this place for?"

"I cannot presume to guess."

"Stuff! You have been guessing all you could. Why not? A man must have some curiosity."

"I suppose you have come here with the desire to do some good."

"Yes, I knew you would think that. A philanthropic woman, an eccentric Lady Bountiful, an ambitious rival of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, I suppose? You are entirely out of it, Mr. Pilgrim; I am not a philanthropist. I am not a lover of my fellow-man or my fellow-woman. I don't care three rows of pins about the whole human race. Why should I pretend to love the human race? I don't care about anybody whom I don't know, and I care about very few that I do know; and of these very few I don't suppose any one

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cares much about me. I regard mankind, taken all round, as an absolute failure, and I don't believe in any attempt to improve his wretched, ignoble, miserable existence. No; I have come here for a purely selfish purpose." She leaned complacently back in her chair, and looked at him. He was easily embarrassed, and she seemed to find satisfaction in embarrassing him. "You don't believe it; you think I am talking for effect?" she said at last.

"I don't believe your purpose is selfish in that sense," he said slowly, avoiding her eyes.

"In what sense?"

"Well, in the ordinary sense; in the sense we all have in our minds when we say a thing is selfish."

"You shall see whether it is selfish or not. I have something on my conscience, Mr. Pilgrim. I was unkind and hard to one who had claims on me; and I owe his memory a reparation; I shall never pass a quiet day or enjoy a night of dreamless sleep until I have done something in that way. I see a chance of doing something of the kind here, and I fancy it may be in your power to help me. That's why I am here. The broken-down epicure who goes to some bath or cure to get rid of his gout or his dyspepsia is not one bit more selfish in his purpose than I am in mine. Do you believe me?"

"I believe you are speaking sincerely, madame, but in that sense a Christian's repentance would be only selfish."

"Well, so it is sometimes, I dare say. No matter; all I wished to impress upon your mind is that I am not a philanthropic woman, or a woman with a mission, or anything of that sort. I am anxious to know something about this place and the people in it, Mr. Pilgrim; and I dare say you can tell me."

"I go very little among them; I lead a very quiet sort of life here."

"Still you must see something of people. You teach in the evenings, I am told?"

"I teach shorthand, when I can get pupils, madame. There is not much opportunity for teaching anything in this place."

"No; I should suppose not. Have you any pupils now?"

"I have two—two regular pupils, and one who comes at odd times, now and then, when he likes, or when he can."

"The two regular pupils, are they boys or girls?"

"One is a boy; the other——"

"Is a girl; yes. A little girl, or a young woman?"

"A young woman."

"Poor?"

"Very poor. Her mother hopes to get her taught shorthand well enough to take a situation as private secretary of some kind."

"Private secretary? Well, I may want such a functionary myself. What sort of a girl is she?"

"Quick, clever, good-natured; discontented with her life here. I don't see how she could be anything else."

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"She is pretty, you say?"

"She is pretty, madame; but I did not say so."

Mrs. Pollen smiled. "That is how I knew," she said.

Mr. Pilgrim looked puzzled. There was a moment of silence.

"Do your pupils come to you, or you go to them?" she asked.

"The young men come to me; I go to the girl's house."

"The young men come to me; I go to the girl's house," Mrs. Pollen repeated meditatively. "That sounds like a sentence in a foreign phrase-book, doesn't it?"

"I don't know, madame; I was merely answering a natural question in what seemed to me a natural way."

"Quite so," Mrs. Pollen said, as if she had not been listening to his later words. Then she turned quickly to him. "You think me an odd sort of woman, and you are right enough in that. I am an odd sort of woman. But I am not a bad sort of woman, and whatever my manner may seem I would ask you not to suppose for a moment that I mean to offend you. I sometimes say things just to give myself time to follow out some little track or other in my own mind, and then people are apt to think I am rude. I let them think it, people in general, if they will; but you are not people in general. I believe you can serve the purpose I have at heart, and I like you; and that is one reason why I wish to know all about you; and I think I do understand you pretty well already. I am sure the more I see of you the more I shall like you; and I don't pay compliments. I am an egotistical woman, and I have been long accustomed to indulge myself and my own ways, and I think you can help me just now—we shall be friends, shan't we?"

Her eyes almost frightened him. "I have very few friends," he began to say.

"All right; then you have the greater opening for me. Now, just a word. I want to make an impression on this place; I want to get into people's confidence; I have a reason for it. I want to know all about everybody—men, women, and children. I am ready to play the part of lady patroness or anything else. How is it to be done best? Shall I make a splash; or grow on the place in modest quietness? Should I be vulgar, or would it be better to go in for being refined? I *could* play the part, I *think*. But at all events I could try."

He remained thinking for a while; not quite sure whether she was speaking in good faith or not. At last he said—

"We are very poor here, madame. Our lives, the lives of nearly all of us, are pinched and withered by poverty. If we have pleasant dreams at night they are always dreams of money; and we wake in the morning to find that we have nothing in the house and that the tax-collector is knocking at the door again. Our idea of an angel here would only be a beneficent creature in a gilded carriage with a big purse in its pocket."

"All right," Mrs. Pollen replied complacently, "I understand. I can be that sort of angel anyhow; that is my form. It is a com-

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fort to find a place where my angelic nature can be accepted on such terms. Well, about this house; I'll think it over and write to you or send to you in a day or two. Don't do anything until you hear from me. If people ask you about me, you can say, if you like, that you believe I am awfully rich, and that you are told I'm such a fool that I don't care what I do with my money. That will fetch them, won't it? Now I want you to give me a description, a sort of outline sketch, of the place and the people; the high and the low. Tell me about this house, and tell me who are the big people of the place, and who are remarkable, and whom you like and whom you don't like. You talk and I'll listen; I shan't say a word until you have finished. It is an opportunity you ought to make the most of, Mr. Pilgrim. I am a talking woman in general; but I'll listen to you."

So Mrs. Pollen settled herself into her chair, leaned back in the comfortable attitude of a listener, and looked to him to begin. There was nothing for it but to fall into her humour the best way he could. So he began; too shy even to have the courage to plead his shyness. He spoke in a low tone, with his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the ground the while; but he told his tale in good literary style, with an odd dash of subtle humour now and then. Among other things he told her that the institution long domiciled in Fitzurse House had been founded originally by the pious and patriotic will of one of the members of the Fitzurse family. It was founded for the purpose of educating and putting out in life all deserving boys born in the locality whose fathers, grandfathers, or male guardians of any kind had fallen in battle on sea or land, fighting for their king and the country against the French. In the early days of the wars with Napoleon, when the institution had a large number of boys inhabiting it and depending on it, the old family mansion wanted a tenant. The trustees of the institution took it on a lease for seventy-five years and established their boys in it. Time passed on and the boys were all put out into the world, and some of them grew to be old men and many of them died, and there were with each succeeding season fewer and fewer competitors for vacant places. The country got out of the way of fighting the French, and at length the supply of grandsons of a naval or military hero "gave out," as Mr. Pilgrim quaintly put it, and it was plain that there was no way of renewing the stock. The trustees, therefore, made up their minds to try to get the legislature to set aside the conditions of the pious founder's will, so far at least as to make its bounty applicable to the children of those who had fallen fighting their country's enemies of whatever race or climate. Even this, however, would not alter the conditions of things so far as to require the maintenance of a very large establishment. "Fitzurseham does not supply many heroes, madame, to army or navy," Mr. Pilgrim said, and neither army nor navy had much fighting work to do. So the trustees decided that as the term of the lease was drawing to a close they would give up the house and grounds altogether, and let

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them pass into the possession of their actual owner. Times, as we know, had changed with the ownership too; the house and grounds had been sold by order of the Court of Chancery, and the late Mr. Pollen was the purchaser. One of his latest acts of purse-proud complacency was to buy the great old family mansion which he used to regard with reverence and awe in the far-off days when he was a poor little ragged boy in Fitzurseham. The institution had long ceased to do any teaching; for the good reason that there were no boys to teach. The last boy whom it had educated and put out into the world was a clever conceited lad named Walter Fitzurse, "one of my regular pupils, madame." Walter Fitzurse's maternal grand-uncle had been a powder monkey on board one of Cochrane's ships when Cochrane was fighting the French in the Basque Roads. He was killed there, and the trustees made out somehow in their good nature that his death constituted a claim on behalf of his elder sister's sons, which they were bound to recognize. So Walter Fitzurse's father came to be educated and put out in the world by the St. Walter's Foundation, and Walter Fitzurse himself was allowed a right of succession. He was educated and put out into the world; that is to say, the trustees, when he had done with his schooling, gave him one hundred and fifty pounds, and left him to go his way.

"One question, Mr. Pilgrim. This young man; is he one of the old family?"

"I don't think so, madame. His father only took the name of Fitzurse just before this lad was born, and called him Walter Fitzurse. It was a dream or a craze of his; and this young man prefers to accept it as a reality. No one else does that I know of."

He told her many more things about the place and its people. At last he came to an end and was silent. Mrs. Pollen looked keenly at him when he had finished his description, and, seeing that his eyes were fixed upon the gravel walk, she permitted herself to indulge in a quiet smile at his expense; or, at least, at the expense of a conjecture she had been forming concerning him. Then she said—

"Your description is very interesting. But are there no women? You haven't told me anything about any women, except the one girl who learns shorthand. You didn't think they would interest me, perhaps? Well, they don't as a rule; but still, as I shall have to know something of them, I might as well be prepared."

"Yes, certainly there are women," he answered slowly.

"You are not a woman-hater, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"No, madame; at least I think not."

"I think not also. I am very sure of it."

"May I ask, madame, why you are sure of it?"

"Perhaps mine was a general reflection; it may not have been a personal one; anyhow, I have never found a real woman-hater among men. Well, now about these women—the women here—I am curious."

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"There are the ladies, as we call them here."

"Yes; begin with the ladies, as you call them here. We will come to the women afterwards."

"We have very few ladies. There is the Rector's wife. The Rector here is a great swell; he is an honourable, the second son of some lord. His wife is a greater swell even—she is the daughter of an earl. They have a house here, but they don't live in it much; they live in the West End of London. They come and stay here now and then; and he preaches a sermon or two, and she gets up charitable and amateur concerts. They have two daughters."

"Pretty?"

"One is; the eldest—a little, pale, light-haired thing; the other is only a child. They have a son; he is in the army—away with his regiment in Egypt or somewhere."

"Any other ladies?"

"There is a lady—a young lady, who lives with them, in town and here."

"A relation of theirs?"

"No, I believe not; I have heard not. I am told that they are taking charge of her—bringing her out. I don't understand much about such things."

"I understand, quite. That is one of the professional occupations of the aristocracy of England nowadays, to introduce rich young plebeian women into society. It is a good business, and they get well paid for it."

"This young lady," he said sharply, "isn't a plebeian; at least, she does not look like one, I think."

"Are you a patrician, Mr. Pilgrim?"

He looked up suddenly, with a colour on his cheek, and emotion on his sensitive lips. Did the woman mean to mock him and his humble station? She did not look as if she meant mockery. Her eyes were fixed upon his with the earnest expression of a child who has put an innocent question and is waiting for the answer. So he replied with something like composure—

"Of course not, madame; I am a poor and humble man. My father was a working clockmaker; my mother was a dressmaker in a very small way."

"Then why were you so ready to insist that this young woman, whoever she is, was not a plebeian? Why shouldn't she be a plebeian? Of course she is, or she wouldn't have to pay for her introduction into the society of the patricians. You and I are plebeians; we ought to stand by our order and not to be ashamed of it. Well, this young lady; I'll tell you something about her. She is very pretty; or handsome, rather, I should call her. She is tall and dark-eyed, and walks very gracefully—something what certain persons would call 'queen-like' about her. She is sweet and bright in manner, and has kindly sympathetic ways. You know her better than you know the other ladies, I think; she talks to you more, doesn't she?"

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"You know all about her, madame," he said, looking up with quick surprise. "I thought you knew nothing."

"I give you my word of honour, Mr. Pilgrim—and things are so mixed and upset of late years with women's rights and all the rest of it, that we women are getting into the habit of giving our word of honour, and even of keeping it—I give you my word of honour, I never heard of the young lady's existence until you spoke of her just now."

Mr. Pilgrim was not a man whose emotions usually found quick and vivid expression in his face. This time, however, his eyes lighted with wonder.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Pilgrim; it's not the black art, I can assure you."

"Is this what they call thought-reading?" he asked. "I was told that was all rubbish."

"It is not what they call thought-reading in London, and show off for money in public halls. But it is really a sort of thought-reading—face-reading, word-reading, hand-reading—using one's eyes, I call it, and putting two and two together. That's all, Mr. Pilgrim; you could do it as well as I, if you would just give your attention to it."

"I can't see it." He shook his head.

"Can't you? I'll make it plain to you—so far as this matter is concerned. You said this young woman didn't look like a plebeian; I assumed that she must be tall and stately. You spoke of the other girl as a little, pale, light-haired thing; I knew from that that this girl must be dark. You were very angry at the idea of the tall girl being called plebeian; I took it for granted that you had more interest in her than in the other, that you knew her better, and that she must be a friendly and sympathetic girl. Is there any witchcraft in that, Mr. Pilgrim? That's how it is done."

Before he had time to recover from his surprise the gate was heard to open, and a man was seen coming in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mr. Pilgrim said. "This is one of my pupils; the one who comes irregularly. Will you excuse me a moment?"

"Certainly. But stay; just a word; perhaps I should like to see him. Is he interesting?"

"Very interesting to me, madame. He is, I think, the only friend I have."

"That is interesting to begin with." The new-comer, meanwhile seeing Mr. Pilgrim engaged in talk with a lady, had come to an abrupt halt near a flower-bed, in the soft sunlight. Mrs. Pollen went on with her interrogatory as if the visitor could have no better business in life than to wait until she was ready to talk to him. "What is he? What does he do?"

"He has done a great many things, madame; he could do anything if he tried."

"I have seen scores of these men who could do anything if they

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tried, and I have lost faith in them. Still I should like to know your friend. Is he rich?"

"I believe, madame, he has enough."

"Indeed? Now, I should by all means like to see the man who has enough. Will you ask him to speak to me, Mr. Pilgrim?"

Mr. Pilgrim went and spoke a few words to his friend, and then they came up together.

"A gentleman," Mrs. Pollen said to herself as she saw the newcomer. "Not of Mr. Pilgrim's class. Must be a good fellow, as poor Pilgrim likes him so much."

He was a handsome, well set-up young man, with rapid, easy movements, and a profile slightly aquiline; a slight moustache and no beard.

"Decidedly I like him," she thought.

"Allow me, madame," Mr. Pilgrim said, "to present to you Mr. Albert Romont."

"Albert Romont? Are you Bertie Romont?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"People do call me Bertie Romont, I suppose," he added composedly. "The passion for diminutives is something implanted in the human heart."

"Then you are the young man we have been reading about in the newspapers? It was you who went out to New York as a steerage passenger in some dreadful ship and came back and wrote all about it; and you went and lived in some shocking place here in Fitzurseham, and showed up all the horrors in the papers?"

"Yes, I did that; but there wasn't much to make a talk about. It was capital fun; and it was quite time somebody did something about this place here." His eyebrows contracted; he was speaking in good earnest.

"Well, I can quite believe that. How long did you live in the place?"

"Oh, a few weeks only. Just enough to see exactly how the unfortunate people were living, and how little anybody was doing for them or thinking about them. But I really do not deserve any credit; I liked it. I like seeing things for myself. I dare say I wouldn't have done it if I didn't like it."

"Did our friend here, Mr. Pilgrim, know all about the enterprise?"

"Oh yes; helped me in lots of ways."

Mr. Pilgrim had been standing out of the conversation thus far; he now edged awkwardly in. He felt inwardly delighted that Mrs. Pollen seemed to take so readily to his friend.

"Pilgrim and I are old chums," the young man said. "I don't do anything without his advice."

"I want to do something for these poor people, if I can," Mrs. Pollen said. "I hope you will show me what to do and how to do it."

"I don't think there is much to be done in that sort of way," Romont said abruptly.

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"In what sort of way?"

"Well, I suppose you mean in the way of generosity or charity. I suppose you mean the giving of money. I don't know that you wouldn't be likely to do more harm than good."

"But you can teach me how to do good and not harm, I suppose? Is there anything to be done for them without money?"

"The money is so apt to go to the wrong people."

"It generally goes to the wrong people in life, I am inclined to think. But come, have you any objection to my trying to do some good for these unfortunate creatures? I shall be here a good deal, you know. Do you want to keep your beneficence all to yourself? May I not lend a hand?"

"Oh yes, of course; I have no objection——"

"Considerate young man!"

"Only things are apt to get muddled somehow, especially when —well, when——"

"When women interfere?"

"Well, yes, Mrs. Pollen, as you put it so plainly."

"I am sure your manner put it plainly enough."

"I am afraid I have got into a way of saying out too directly what I think."

"Don't you think much of women? Some woman spoils you, I feel sure," Mrs. Pollen said, looking at him with an expression of half-pitying interest. "Tell me who it is. Is it your mother?"

"It is my mother," he answered, with a laugh and a boyish blush on his handsome face.

"I thought so. You are a younger son, of course?"

"Yes, I am a younger son; but how did you know?"

"Isn't it plain enough? Mothers only spoil their younger sons. What a lucky thing for you that your whims took the form of philanthropy; for I dare say your mother would have indulged you in any folly. Shall I say any other folly?"

"I dare say she would." He was much amused and interested by her outspoken ways and her singular faculty of jumping to right conclusions.

"Well, I like *you*," Mrs. Pollen said. "Your mother must be a very sweet woman, I am sure. I think she has spoiled you very nicely. Yes, I like you, and I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope so too. I am sure we shall; and in the meantime will you allow me to suspend my judgment?"

"About me?"

"If you please." He was evidently determined to be as outspoken as she was.

"Certainly. I shouldn't like you to make up your mind about people as quickly as I do. You are sure to like me when you know me, and I can wait."

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CHAPTER III.

CAMIOLA.

THE Rector's house was the most considerable dwelling in Fitzurseham, leaving, of course, the lonely Fitzurse House out of the question. The Rector's house was a lofty, spacious, Georgian building of the least picturesque order, standing in all its unadorned ugliness behind low stone walls, iron railings, and a great iron gate surmounted by a gas-lamp. On either side of the gate, with its modern innovation of a lamp, were the iron extinguishers which told of the days when the footmen still carried the links to light their master's way. The Honourable and Rev. St. George Lisle, the Rector, did not come to his house in Fitzurseham very often, or stay there long when he did come. He had excellent curates, who did the work for him in what he had long been accustomed to consider a very satisfactory way. But he was neither a very rich man nor a lazy man, and he had church business to attend to in the west-end parish, where he usually lived. He was a tall, pulpy, willowy sort of man; he had an oblong, florid face, lightly thatched with yellowish hair. His eyes were of a mild blue, and were protected by moony spectacles. He was a well-meaning and an earnest man, something of a scholar in a certain way, very kindly, and more than merely willing to do good. But he was puzzled by most of the problems of the living world. Troublesome questions came up in his path and staggered him. He went through life like a short-sighted and awkward man trying to make rapid way along a crowded street, jostled here, jolted there, fancying he recognizes a passing face, and as he tries to look after it shaken out of all dignity by hurrying passengers and put much in peril by hansom cabs. People commonly took him for self-conceited and cold, when he was only shy and awkward. He found it hard to talk to any one who had not a training and social habits like his own. He longed to get into sympathy with the poor of his district, but constantly broke down in the attempt to keep a conversation going. Once fairly started with some poor, working wife in her garret or her little back parlour, he could get on very well, and she soon came to understand his kindness and his good intentions, and became confidential with him and took to him. But every time he saw her afterwards he had to begin over again; to-day's beginning just as difficult to him as yesterday's. With men of the poorer class he could hardly get on at all.

Just at present the Lisles were staying in Fitzurseham, and were going to make a longer stay than usual there. The question of the housing of the London poor had come up, and the Rector's wife, Lady Letitia Lisle, one day saw to her horror a letter written in one of the morning papers, describing the condition of some

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of the squalid houses of Fitzurseham, which were declared to be an utter disgrace even to London, and pointing to the fact that the Honourable and Rev. St. George Lisle was the rector of the place, and was a pluralist, and seldom came near Fitzurseham, and did not seem to know or care anything about the misery of its slums. The worst of it was that the writer signed the letter with his name, and that Lady Letitia knew the name, and knew, therefore, that the statements were but too likely to be true.

"To think of my old friend Kitty Romont's son treating me in such a way!" Lady Letitia said, quite aloud, as she put down the paper aghast. She was alone, but she could not keep from putting her thoughts into words. She was a kind-hearted woman, and not more egotistic than other people; but for the moment the whole thing seemed a wrong done to her. "My old friend Kitty Romont's son to write such a letter"—about *her*, or at least about the place in which her husband was interested; that was the same thing. "I haven't seen her for a long time; I suppose that is the reason," she went on to argue. "I don't think I ever saw him. I wish I had asked him here. But I always heard he was eccentric—going about the world and starting all sorts of absurd things."

The letter was signed "Albert J. Romont," and was dated from one of the clubs in St. James's Street. There could be no mistake about it; the writer was the son of her old friend. Besides, she had heard of some of his doings before, just as Mrs. Pollen had.

"I do so wish I had seen her lately," Lady Letitia went on, still thinking of her old friend; "she might have prevented this. But she is so seldom in town; and one has so much to do, one gets out of the way of looking after people if they don't come in one's way. It is really too bad. My poor dear St. George will be in a terrible state of mind. I suppose I must tell him of it? Some one would be sure to talk about it; and—oh yes, of course he ought to be told."

She fluttered to her husband with the paper in her hand, and she showed him Bertie Romont's letter, and they talked the matter over. They agreed that the thing was shocking, and that something must be done. The first step that was evidently necessary to take was to swoop upon Fitzurseham and see how they could help to improve the condition of affairs there. So they transferred themselves at once to their house in Fitzurseham, with their two daughters, Letitia Janette—always called Janette—and Alice, who was still only a girl in short frocks, and the young lady, Miss Camiola Sabine, about whose appearance and temperament Mrs. Pollen made such shrewd conjecture during her talk with Christian Pilgrim.

Miss Sabine had no near relations living. Her father and mother had been long dead; she had for many years been under the nominal care of an uncle, who was making vast sums of money somewhere out in South America. He was a very good uncle to Camiola. He had her well educated in England, and he had then

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contrived, through the intervention of friends and family lawyers, to get her domesticated in Lady Letitia's house, with the view of thus securing for her an entrance into good society. Mr. Sabine was understood to have begun his career as a cabin boy in a China ship, and he did not himself care for the gilded saloons of fashion, but he was resolved that his niece should be a lady. The St. George Lisles, as we have said, were not very rich, and money was no object to Mr. Sabine. So the thing was done; such things are done. Not long after came the news of Mr. Sabine's death, and he had left Camiola a large fortune.

Nature, destiny, and mankind, including women, would seem to have been in a conspiracy to spoil Miss Sabine. She was young, she was handsome, she was practically her own mistress and would be literally and legally her own mistress before long. She was very rich. She could not, indeed, boast of her family, but she had observation enough to know that there was much shrewd good sense in Lady Letitia's frequent declaration that this is not the day for good families, and that money is king and holds court and gives out patents of precedence just now. Therefore she was quite conscious of her own advantages in the way of fortune, and she knew as well that she was likely to be run after by men as she knew that if she fell into the Thames she would get wet. Perhaps she would have been spoiled, perhaps her very best endowments of person and nature would have contributed to spoiling her, if heaven had not blessed her with one saving grace—the grace of humour; the gift of seeing the ridiculous as well as the heroic side of things; the gift, in fact, of seeing things as they are. By virtue of this possession she was able to see her position exactly as it was, and there was a good deal in it which gave her occasion for many a quiet smile. A young woman of no family undergoing the process of formal and gradual introduction to good society, and paying so much a year for the operation, was a creature in whose story she could not for the life of her help seeing something that was highly humorous, not to say ridiculous.

Camiola had now been three years domiciled with the Lisles, and it was more than a year since the death of her uncle. She had not often seen him, but she could not be otherwise than devotedly attached to him after all he had done for her; and she had somehow got it into her mind that he must have been in love with her mother, and must have kept habitually away from England in former days on that account. It was just as well that she had not seen much of him, because her gratitude and her imagination were thereby enabled to convert him into a hero and a patron saint; whereas the truth is that, though a thoroughly good-hearted and generous man, he was in the habit of drinking a good deal, smoking a great deal, and swearing ever so much, and had contracted many loose ways of living in South America which would not have had any charm for a young woman well brought up in England.

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Lady Letitia Lisle was a shapely little woman, with quick glancing eyes and sensitive lips. She was over forty, but did not look more than thirty; the fact that her hair had grown prematurely grey only making by contrast the youthful-looking face seem still more youthful. Mrs. Pollen had guessed well about Miss Sabine's appearance. Camiola was rather tall, and was exactly what one would call in the best sense of the word a fine girl. She had a finely formed head, a finely shaped neck, and the head well set on the neck. She had not merely grace of figure, but that rarer gift, grace of movement. Her thick hair was dark brown, and came rather low on her forehead, even for the fashion of our days. She had soft, dark, kindly eyes, in the depths of which sparkled a keen twinkle of humour, in sympathy and keeping with the frequent expression on her somewhat full lips.

A day or two after Mrs. Pollen's arrival in Fitzurseham, Lady Letitia and Miss Sabine were standing in the breakfast-room, Miss Sabine dressed for going out. Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia had been bestirring themselves about the condition of the poor. Meanwhile Lady Letitia was going to entertain all the congregation, rich and poor. There was to be a concert by amateurs; there were to be various amusements; everybody who could do anything was to be pressed into the service. The entertainment was meant for the poor; but those who were not poor were expected to come also, in order that the poor might not feel themselves classified according to their poverty. Miss Sabine, who had a good deal of the practical in her—"I come from the working-lot, you know," she sometimes said—was going to accompany Mr. Lisle, who had to make some purchases and arrangements, and so forth.

"Please see that they don't impose on him more than is reasonable, Camiola dear," said Lady Letitia; "and bring him back in proper time. I trust to you altogether."

"You sit still, Horace, and I'll get you there on time," was the reply of Miss Sabine. She was citing an American joke which she had read somewhere concerning a late eminent American public man. Lady Letitia did not understand in the least, but she asked no question. Mr. Lisle had not yet shown himself.

"Oh, by the way, there's one thing I must really insist on, Camiola," said Lady Letitia suddenly, "and that is that you don't talk too much to that poor man—that old man or old young man, or whatever he is, the man with the white head, who lives in Fitzurse House. What is his name?"

"Mr. Pilgrim—Christian Pilgrim."

"Phœbus, what a name!" Lady Letitia quoted from her husband's favourite poet. "Where on earth did he get such a name? Christian Pilgrim! It sounds like something in the 'Pilgrim's Progress' or Baxter's 'Call to the Unconverted.'"

"It was something of the kind, I believe. He told me that his mother was a very devout woman, and, as their name was Pilgrim, she wished to mark him out as a Christian Pilgrim, and had him

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called so. It sounds odd at first, but one gets used to it. I think I like it now."

"He told you all this himself? You are on very confidential terms apparently?"

"Yes; I like him, and I think he likes me. He was very shy at first, but I have managed to draw him out."

"I should like to know whom you couldn't draw out, my dear."

"Well, I think I am generally pretty successful with people. I like taking a shy creature in hand and bringing him bit by bit out of his shell."

"But remember, I want you not to bring this creature too much out of his shell. Let him stay in his shell. You must please me in this, like a dear good girl."

"I'll do anything in the world for you when you speak to me so nicely."

"My dear, I hope I don't often speak to you any way but nicely."

"Indeed, Lady Letitia, you are ever so much too kind and good to me. I should be spoiled if I didn't remember to have a look at myself with my own eyes every now and then. But why may I not talk to Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Not talk too much to him; well, people might think it odd. He's not exactly a person in your class, you know."

"Dear Lady Letitia, I don't quite know anything of the kind. What class am I in? I can't be in your class, or you would not have to take such pains to get me into it. I suppose you could do as much for him if you set your heart on it."

"Money means rank nowadays. When you marry and set up house, I shall beg for an invitation for the girls to all your parties. But it isn't only the talking to Mr. Pilgrim; it is the not talking to other people."

"People are all so dull and so like each other. He is not like everybody; he is interesting."

"But he isn't a gentleman; he isn't a man of education."

"He has more education than I have; he told me a great deal that I didn't know about the stars and the planets. Do you know, Lady Letitia, all about the telescope?"

"No, dear; and I don't want to know. But I am going to have a little star of my own here soon, and I want you to study him, if you don't mind."

"Is he somebody you want to marry me?"

"Nonsense, girl! What a way to talk! Of course he isn't."

"But why of course, Lady Letitia? You do want to marry me off some time to some eligible person. I am on exhibition; I am like one of the girls in the Babylonian slave market; like one of the girls who got the money, you know; not one of the happy creatures whose personal charms were enough. That's one reason why I like talking to such a man as Mr. Pilgrim; he doesn't want to marry me, and nobody will suppose that I want to marry him."

"I wish you wouldn't go on in that way," Lady Letitia remon-

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strated, half vexed, but also half amused, as Miss Sabine could very well see.

"But, dearest Lady Letitia, isn't it only the truth? I know my own position in the world perfectly well. I know that you are my guardian angel, and have taken me under your protection, and I know you are determined not to lose sight of me until you see me safely settled in an eligible marriage. This is all right, I am sure, or you wouldn't do it; but why shouldn't we admit it—between ourselves, I mean, we two, you and I?"

Lady Letitia laughed. "I won't enter on any scheme having to do with your marriage until you are at least one good year older. So you have that much time to consider yourself free of any plans on my part or suitors of my patronizing."

"I should very much like some suitors of your patronizing; I wish you would bring them along. I do believe you got Georgie packed away out of Europe because you were afraid that he might make love to me, or that I might make love to him."

Georgie was Lady Letitia's son, who had gone with his regiment to Egypt.

"It would never do for Georgie and you to fall in love," Lady Letitia said quickly. "What on earth would people say of Mr. Lisle and me if such a thing were to happen? Of course, they would say that we had taken a mean advantage of our position to get our son married to a girl with a lot of money. I wouldn't have such a thing said for all the world."

"I do think mine is a hard lot. I mustn't speak to one man because he isn't a gentleman; and I mustn't speak to another because he is. No matter; I am very happy all the same. But now about this person whom I am to be allowed to talk to. Who is he?"

"Well, it's Bertie Romont—Kitty Romont's son; the young man who has been writing in the newspapers."

Lady Letitia, it should be told, had thought it a good stroke of policy to write at once to Kitty Romont's son in a frank and friendly way, and to ask him to come to see her, so that it might appear that neither bore any malice. Mr. Lisle said it was the proper thing to do, and that for his part he certainly bore no malice.

"Mr. Romont!" Camiola exclaimed; "I am so delighted. I am longing to see him. I do think it was so splendid of him. Of course I can understand that it is very distressing to Mr. Lisle and to you to have such things happen in this place; and I know that Mr. Lisle never could have failed to do his best to prevent them from happening. But still it was fine of him—and so young a man—to take so much trouble for the poor in a place like this. They are not even the picturesque poor; this isn't one of the show-places of poverty, like Bethnal Green and that; it is out of the way of everybody: the special correspondent never heard of it; a philanthropist never came near it before. I think it was really very fine of him."

Mr. Lisle entered the room as she was speaking.

"You see he is getting some fame by it, after all," the Rector

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said; and then added hastily, "I am sorry I said that, for I quite admit that he did a good thing, and that he put some of us in mind of a duty which I fear we were sadly neglecting."

"One can't attend to everything," Lady Letitia said warmly. "You have your work to do in your own district, and no one can say that you don't attend to it."

"That's true enough, Letitia; but people might very fairly say that, if I can't look after Fitzurseham too, I ought not to hold the position."

"You are not a rich man, dear; you can't afford to make sacrifices; people might remember that."

"A man has no right to take money for work he hasn't done. I am afraid there is no getting over that plain way of putting it. But anyhow, I shall try to do better in future; and if I can't look after the place, there will be found some one who can."

"He has got fame by it, all the same," Lady Letitia said, going back upon the previous question.

"But he couldn't have known," Camiola interposed eagerly; "he had no reason to expect anything of the kind. He might have died of the fever; he was very near dying of it, everybody says. And then think of the life he must have led all the time! He lived the life of a poor artisan—a foreign artisan. He slept in a room with several other men; fancy, a man brought up like him! I wonder how he was able to act such a part and keep it up so long, and never be found out."

"Well, that was very cleverly thought of," Mr. Lisle said, "and it did not come so difficult, after all—I mean to a man who could speak French and German fairly well. He gave himself out as an artisan refugee from Alsace. He spoke usually in English, purposely made imperfect, and with a foreign accent; but if he happened to meet with a German, and was under the necessity of talking German, the German would set down his accent to the account of his French bringing up, and a Frenchman would account for his bad French accent by ascribing it to his German associations."

"But why not go as an English working man?" Lady Letitia asked, with a certain tone of scorn, as if she were engaged in the easy work of unmasking a very poor impostor.

"He would have been found out in a moment. Every sentence he spoke would have betrayed him among English working men. The company at the Old Ferry Inn would have known, after the first five minutes he spent in their society, that he wasn't an English working man. Oh, that was all very sensibly planned, you may depend upon it; and very well carried out, I dare say."

"I don't like deception of any kind," Lady Letitia insisted.

"But deception, now," Camiola pleaded; "would you really call that deception—such an attempt as that to find out the truth, and all for the sake of people whom he had never known or seen before? Lady Letitia, if that was deception, and doing nothing is truth, then I prefer the deception to the truth—and that is all I have got to say."

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"Suppose he happened to be a hump-backed elderly man," Lady Letitia asked, "would you be quite as enthusiastic, Camiola?"

"Yes, I should; more enthusiastic. Yes, indeed more enthusiastic, Lady Letitia; for it would be so much braver of him to run such risks if he were elderly and deformed and infirm, and all that. Oh, indeed I should! What do I care whether he is hump-backed or not? it's nothing to me. Perhaps he is, for anything I know."

"Well, well," Lady Letitia said, with a smile, "I shan't argue the point. I am glad there is so much enthusiasm left in the world as some of you young people have to-day."

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK PEARLS.

JUST at this moment a card was brought to Lady Letitia. She read the name, and then gave a little exclamation.

"Oh, St. George dear, it's Mrs. Pollen; you know, the rich woman who owns Fitzurse House. We must see her; we must conciliate her. Where is she?"—to the servant.

"In her carriage, my lady."

"You go and bring her in, St. George."

"No no, my dear! I'd rather leave her to you—at first, I mean. You will get to know what she is like. I want to be off, too. When you get her in, I'll escape; and, of course, I shall be delighted to see her another time."

"I must go with Mr. Lisle," Camiola said, rejoicing that she had to go.

"But I can't be left alone with this woman; I must have somebody," Lady Letitia pleaded. "Oh, Janette, you will stay with me; you and Alice."

The two daughters of the house had come in. Janette, the elder, was a short, slight girl, with pretty features, blue eyes, light hair, and a delicate, wax-like complexion. Janette was an enthusiast and a leveller. Alice was yet in that stage of growth when a girl seems all legs and elbows.

Mr. Lisle and Camiola escaped, and Mrs. Pollen was shown in. She was dressed, of course, in black, and she made a gorgeous display of priceless black pearls. Lady Letitia's eyes took in their splendour at a glance.

"I took the liberty of calling," Mrs. Pollen said, "as I happened to be in the neighbourhood. I am Mrs. Pollen. You have heard of me perhaps. I believe I own a good deal of property here. My husband was very rich. He died at Corfu, and I really want the advice of the Rector about some way of turning it to account—doing good, you know, and all that sort of thing, for the people who live here. I am unceremonious; but you will excuse me, perhaps. I have lived out of England very much of late. I have just come

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from Jerusalem; and, to say the truth, I have always been accustomed to have a good deal of my own way."

Mrs. Pollen was playing a part in all this. It was assumed for a purpose, like her black pearls, and it did not much matter to her how she was received. If those to whom she appealed merely despised her for her pushing manners and her presumption, she would have thought all the better of them, and would have been highly amused. To produce such an impression would have testified to her excellent powers of acting.

Lady Letitia was good-natured in the first instance, was philanthropic in the second, and was a sensible woman of the world in the third. She had heard a great deal about Mrs. Pollen, and she saw that it would be a good thing for Fitzurseham if Mr. Lisle could obtain the direction of Mrs. Pollen's stream of bounty. Mr. Lisle would be glad, too, to talk with any one who had lately been in Jerusalem. Besides, what did Mrs. Pollen's manners matter in Fitzurseham? In London her wealth would easily be made to serve as an excuse for her eccentricity.

"I am delighted to see you," Lady Letitia blandly said; "and I am sure my husband will be charmed to talk to you about Jerusalem. He is greatly interested in the Palestine exploration fund; besides, to whom should one come freely for advice if not to the rector of the parish? My eldest daughter, Mrs. Pollen; my daughter Alice."

"I see you are all very busy," Mrs. Pollen said; "and I am told that you are getting up a concert for some charitable purpose. Can I be of any use, and may I stay? Or am I in the way? If so, pray don't mind telling me; I'll come another time. My time is my own; all my own. I don't know what to do with it. But if I can help, do let me bear a hand. I have had to do with the organizing of many things in my time."

"We shall be only too pleased," Lady Letitia answered. "We are going to have a rehearsal after luncheon. Won't you have luncheon with us, and then you can see afterwards what we are doing, and how you can help us?"

Mrs. Pollen entered into the spirit of the thing.

"May I just throw my hat and coat there?" she said. "On the sofa; anywhere; it doesn't matter. Charming old house this is—is it Queen Anne or Georgian, or what is it? I don't quite know yet what to do with the house that has fallen into my hands here—St. Walter's Foundation that was, you know. I almost think I shall turn it into a dwelling-house again; have it done up and live in it myself."

"That would be charming," Lady Letitia said; and on the spur of the moment she began making mental comparison of the advantages to the neighbourhood of a rich resident in restored Fitzurse House, and the possible personal disadvantages to herself and the girls of having Mrs. Pollen for a near neighbour.

"You are going to have a concert?" Mrs. Pollen said gravely.

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"It's a good idea. Won't much affect the housing of the poor, will it, now? You can't very well invite the particular class who want housing to the concert, can you? The people with fever and all that, I mean?"

"It isn't meant for that," Lady Letitia said, with a slight touch of resentment in her voice. "Of course we know it won't do any good to the poor who want housing. But the whole place isn't made up of poor who want housing. We often get up charitable concerts and bazaars and things; at least not very often, but sometimes; it does good, brings people together."

"Oh yes, quite an excellent idea," Mrs. Pollen said. "Keeps up people's spirits. Isn't there some story about a general who had all the bands set going when some disease broke out in the camp—just to keep up the men's spirit? I think I have read something of the kind; but I forget things so soon."

Lady Letitia was dimly in apprehension that her visitor might be chaffing her. But nothing could exceed the majestic gravity of Mrs. Pollen's large eyes.

"We hope to be able to grapple with the difficulty about the housing of the poor," Lady Letitia said hastily, "in good time; in good time. These things can't be done all at a stroke. No man is more alive to the duties and the responsibilities of his position than Mr. Lisle."

"One difficulty here seems to me," said Mrs. Pollen, "the fact that you have about three times more houses than you want. I see whole rows of new houses standing empty. But your poor are poor, and can't pay for anything better than a share of a cellar or a garret. What's to be done? But I won't talk of all this just now; you pretty ladies can't be expected to understand such things. I'll go into it all with your husband; I fancy I can help him. I'll spend the money if he will only show how it ought to be spent."

This was patronizing indeed; but even ladies of rank who marry clergymen soon get into the way of accepting patronage as one of the necessities of their position.

"I wish I had money," Janette said, with a sigh.

"What would you do with it, my dear young lady?"

"I would devote it to the promotion of great and noble ideas," the dear young lady said, in a solemn tone. "With true ideas there would be no helpless poor and no useless rich."

Mrs. Pollen fixed her eyes on the girl's delicate pretty face. Her heart went out to Janette in a moment. A curious feeling of pity, of compassion, swelled up in her breast.

"Keep to your ideas my dear," she said softly. "They will not make you happy, perhaps, in life; but they will do better for you."

"Janette's a philosopher," said the younger girl pertly. "Papa says she's a philosopher in petticoats."

"Many a philosopher," Mrs. Pollen observed, "might as well have worn petticoats as anything else, for all I could see. But about this concert, Lady Letitia? I have an idea. These rooms

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are not very large, now, are they? What if you were to allow me to lend you Fitzurse House? Fine rooms there and plenty of them. It would be your affair all the same, you know; only the house put at your disposal; kind permission of Mrs. Pollen; that sort of thing. It would be a great attraction; a novelty, don't you think—the old place revived? Come, don't say no; it shan't cost you a penny."

"I am not at all inclined to say no," Lady Letitia answered graciously; "I think it would be a splendid idea. But the place has so long been disused; and the time is so short."

"Money will do anything. I'll set to work at once. We'll employ all the painters and upholsterers and plumbers and carpenters and people in Fitzurseham; that will be something in itself. Is it agreed?"

"I am sure Mr. Lisle will be delighted. I know I am; and I do really think it is ever so good and kind of you."

"Not a bit of it. It amuses me; that's all. Why mightn't we let the young people have a dance too?"

Lady Letitia hesitated. "Well, I don't quite know what Mr. Lisle might think about a dance; he would be rather afraid——"

"We needn't say anything about it in advance. It might start of itself, you know, when the time came. It might be arranged just a little beforehand, like many another excellent *impromptu*. Anyhow, we'll have a good time, and invite all Fitzurseham, not forgetting the young foreign artisan——"

"Oh, you have heard of that?" Lady Letitia said hastily.

"Yes, I have heard of it; and I have seen the young man myself. I like him ever so much."

Lady Letitia and Janette were both very eager to know something about Bertie Romont. Alice did not care in the least. She was as yet only in the age when little girls adore girls of riper years. Mrs. Pollen had now quite dropped her patronizing manner. She was able to see through her new friends, and she saw that affectation of any kind was out of place with them. They were quite sincere, and, as she concluded, good-hearted. She had expected what she called aristocratic airs, and she came determined to assert herself and her money at once. She found Lady Letitia a simple, intelligent, unpretentious woman; like a clergyman's wife, in fact.

They talked on various subjects—the condition of England among the rest—whereon Mrs. Pollen declared that she had had special need of instruction, having been for so many years a wanderer. "Is everything really going to the dogs?" she asked. "People tell me it is. Who is to blame?"

"Man's neglect of his brother is to blame," Janette declared; "it is to blame for everything that is wrong in the world. But the wrongs will be righted; this is an age of hope."

"The righting will come a little too late for some of us," said Lady Letitia.

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"What about the aristocracy and the democracy?" Mrs. Pollen asked, "and the social revolution, whatever that is?"

"My dear woman," said Lady Letitia, "it's of no use talking about the English aristocracy at this time of the day. The aristocracy are gone, and that's all about it. If my husband would take my advice we would drop our ridiculous honourables and ladies, and all the rest of it, and call ourselves Mr. and Mrs. Lisle. The House of Lords will be gone in no time; and even if it weren't done away with, we are doing away with ourselves as fast as we can. We are going into trade every day; we are becoming wine merchants and bankers and cab-owners; I dare say some of us will be glad enough to be cab-drivers before long."

"It is a glorious age, mamma," said Janette, with kindling eyes; "a day when we are all to be men and women at last, not members of different and hostile classes. Every one ought to be proud to live in such a day, and to work in such a movement."

"Janette is a working member of the Band of Hope," said Lady Letitia, in a tone of resignation. "She visits the poor—that is, the Radical poor. She can tell you all about the social revolution."

"I am sick of it all," said the younger daughter.

"Sick of what?"

"Of everything, mamma."

"It will be hard work to get a girl of good family married in times like these," Lady Letitia said despondently. "What rising man would hamper himself now with any woman who had a handle to her name? I read some stupid stuff in a society paper the other day about a rich Radical member of parliament being on the look-out for some Lady Jane or Lady Blanche or Lady Something to marry and bring him social distinction. As if he didn't know better than that!—as if any one is taken in by us now! What good could Lady Jane or Lady Blanche do for him? If he wants money he had much better look out among the daughters of the soap-boilers and the cotton-spinners; if he doesn't he had better marry his washerwoman's daughter, and prove to his Radical supporters the sincerity of his Radical principles. Oh, here's Miss Sabine coming in. We can't have any more of this talk; she might think it was directed against her."

"Camiola could not possibly think that anything you or I could say, mamma, was meant to offend her. I am sure I envy Camiola very much; I think her ever so much my superior," said Janette warmly.

"My dear, I am quite sure I envy her, too," Lady Letitia said; "and I am quite ready to admit that she is ever so much my superior. I wish you had her fortune——"

"Oh, mamma, please don't talk like that——"

"And that she had twice as much, child," Lady Letitia added good-humouredly. "Will that satisfy you? That is wishing good to you and twice as much to her."

"*I* don't like her," said Alice.

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"Nonsense, Alice; of course you like her."

"No, I don't; I detest her—because you and Janette like her, and papa likes her; and so I hate her."

"Alice's bark is worse than her bite," said Lady Letitia.

Mr. Lisle and Miss Sabine came in and were duly presented to Mrs. Pollen; and it was arranged that Mrs. Pollen's offer was to be accepted, and that the popular entertainment was to come off in renovated Fitzurse House. Mr. Lisle was rather taken with Mrs. Pollen and her generous ways. Besides, he was not usually very good at talking to women, and she had so much to say that she did not tax his conversational powers very heavily. They spoke about the condition of the poor in that neighbourhood, and Mrs. Pollen made many shrewd and sensible suggestions. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pollen kept her eyes on everything and every person, and lost nothing of what was going on. She was studying the inmates of the Rector's house according to her wont. She did not fail to notice that when Camiola sat next to Alice Lisle and talked to her the little girl blushed crimson. "The child adores this handsome Camiola whom she says she detests; she adores her and is jealous of every one who speaks to Camiola or is spoken to by her—that's my reading of *that*," Isabel Polien said to herself. Of Janette she thought: "She is a dreamer; she will be awakened; she will be unhappy."

There was some talk at luncheon about the various forms of human ambition.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Pollen, turning suddenly to Camiola, in her abrupt, imperious, kindly fashion, "what would be your ambition, Miss Sabine?"

"Oh, I don't know," Camiola answered, blushing slightly. "I don't believe I have any ambition. I think I should like to make people happy."

"Couldn't be a better ambition," said Mr. Lisle.

"Couldn't be a better ambition, truly," Mrs. Pollen echoed. "Only I don't know how this young lady could gratify her ambition to make some people happy without at the same time making other people unhappy."

"I don't understand," Camiola said.

"'The simile,'" Mrs. Pollen quoted from Hood's "Fair Inez," "'that blest one lover's heart has broken many more.'"

"I wasn't thinking of lovers." Camiola spoke with a certain scornfulness in her manner.

At this moment a servant handed a telegram and a card to Lady Letitia.

"May I look at this telegram?" Lady Letitia said. "Why," she exclaimed, "it's from Georgie! He is in Southampton; he is coming home—good heavens! can he be wounded?"

"He must be wounded, or sick, or he would not come home," Mr. Lisle said, turning pale.

"But he says in this he is quite well. Look, St. George" She handed the telegram to the Rector.

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There was a general movement of wonder, alarm, delight. Mrs. Pollen kept her eyes fixed on Camiola. "She does not care for him," was her conclusion. "He is not the one."

For a moment or two the visitor's card was altogether overlooked and forgotten.

"It must be all right," Mr. Lisle decided. "Georgie tells us that he is quite well. Perhaps the campaign is over. The papers did not tell us so; but the papers so seldom know anything. Anyhow, he says he is quite well, and we shall know all about it in an hour or two."

Then Lady Letitia took up the card; first glanced at it, and then looked at it with deepened interest.

"St. George, dear," she said to her husband, "it's Kitty Romont's son."

CHAPTER V.

KITTY ROMONT'S SON.

THE only event likely to happen in everyday life which could have turned Lady Letitia's attention for one moment from the expected coming home of her boy was this visit from Kitty Romont's son. She hardly knew how she was to receive him, or how he would receive her. She felt angry with him, and yet penitent about him. Why had he dared to attack the friend and schoolmate of his mother? Why, on the other hand, had the friend and schoolmate of his mother never found time to make his personal acquaintance? Mr. Lisle had long since made up his mind that the young man was perfectly right in what he had done, and was only anxious for a quiet opportunity of telling Romont so. But he, too, a little dreaded the first meeting, and that in the presence of Mrs. Pollen.

Camiola and Janette were both greatly excited and eager. They were longing to see the young hero, and did not concern themselves about the rights and the wrongs of the controversy he had awakened. They were quite certain that Mr. Lisle must have been right in whatever he said or did; that was a fundamental axiom to rest upon; but they admired the young hero, or were prepared to admire him, without reference to fundamental axioms.

To Mrs. Pollen the whole scene was, as she would herself have said, as good as a play. She was curious to see how Romont would present himself, and how he would be received, and in which of the girls he would seem to take an interest.

Romont was not without his own sense of uneasiness. He did not know how he might be received. He began to think that he had not acted with enough of forbearance and moderation in his denunciation of the evils of Fitzurseham. Perhaps he ought to have made more careful inquiry into the personal character and local responsibilities of Mr. Lisle. It was not, however, Mr. Lisle

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he feared, but Lady Letitia. A man, he knew, would always put on some outward and seemly show of courtesy and welcome, but he could not answer for Lady Letitia's feelings. One thing he was quite determined on—he would take anything that might be said meekly and penitentially. So he came into the room with firmly compressed nervous lips and a slight flush on his handsome face, and eyes that looked round the company appealingly. Perhaps he was not a little pleased to see that Mrs. Pollen was there. He knew by instinct that he could count on her. He had quick perceptions, and before his presence had been fully announced he took in and could put a name to every one in the room except Camiola. He had not seen any one of them before except Mrs. Pollen. The Lisle family were never in Fitzurseham while he was there. He was given to wandering purposeless about various out-of-the-way parts of London, being a man who loved to alternate fits of eager work of some kind with still more delightful fits of indolence and vagrancy. In one of these latter moods he drifted into Fitzurseham, and was captivated by the picturesque desolation of the dreary place, and he came upon Fitzurse House, and made the acquaintance of Pilgrim, and was smitten with a sudden and intense desire to learn shorthand. He had heard that to know shorthand proved the making of ever so many fellows in all sorts of pursuits and all manner of difficulties; and he was always beginning to learn something on this principle, and then, it must be owned, dropping it before he had attained the requisite mastery of it. The truth was, he liked talking with Pilgrim, and he was glad of an excuse for visiting and re-visiting the place. But Pilgrim had not told him much about the Lisles, and only mentioned the fact that they were charged with the introduction into good society of a young woman who had money and not rank, and whom Bertie at once assumed to be fat, ugly, and vulgar, something like Miss Swartz in "Vanity Fair." He had forgotten all about this young woman when he entered the room, and he could not at first account for the girl, whose appearance strangely impressed him even in the trying moment when he was advancing to meet Lady Letitia.

Lady Letitia was charmed by his bright and frank expression, by the appealing look in his eyes, and the memories which his face brought up.

"Great Heavens!" was her exclamation, "how like your mother! I am so glad to see you, Mr. Romont. But no; I can't call Kitty's son, Mr. Romont; I must call you Bertie."

"Dear friend," Romont said, with a certain fervour; for indeed he was greatly relieved, and he meant what he said.

It was a treaty of peace and amity struck up on the moment. Lady Letitia, acting on mere impulse and instinct, had done the very best thing possible for all parties. Mr. Lisle gave Romont a cordial welcome. Janette made for the young social hero, friend of his brother-man, with outstretched hands and eyes beaming with enthusiasm. Camiola was quite prepared to meet him with

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equal enthusiasm, and would have had no hesitation in telling him so; but there was something constrained, she thought, in his manner when he was presented to her; something quite different from the cordial familiarity with which he took to Janette; and she kept back and demeaned herself somewhat coldly, and presently began to tell herself that he was a good deal too well-dressed and too like an ordinary young West End swell to be her ideal of a hero. "He knows I am not a girl of family," she said to herself; "he does not feel bound to be as civil to me as he is to Janette. Very well; I don't mind."

The truth is simply that Romont had not caught Miss Sabine's name, and was uncertain what he ought to say, and was much impressed, almost for the moment overwhelmed, by her unexpected beauty and grace. This, to be sure, was only for a second's time. He was not exactly the sort of young man to be dumfounded by a girl's good looks, and he had seen a few handsome girls before seeing Miss Sabine. But before he had time to pull himself together, Camiola had assumed her cold and distant air, and had withdrawn herself for the moment, metaphorically at least, into the corner. So the first meeting of these two was rather a failure. Mr. Lisle had some earnest talk with Romont about the condition of the Fitzurseham poor and what ought to be done to improve it; but the talk was not long kept up, and was meant only as an overture to other talks on the same subject in private. The general conversation turned a good deal on Lady Letitia's approaching festivities, in which Romont promised to lend all the assistance in his power; but in the success of which he did not pretend to have any great faith.

"You can't bring people together in this country," he said, "the poor and the rich. It isn't coming together; they won't come together. I have seen it tried."

"Oh, please, Mr. Romont, don't talk in that way!" Janette pleaded, almost indignantly. "If I did not believe in the near approach of a time when these ignoble distinctions of money and class are to disappear, I should not believe in anything."

"I don't think it is the fault of the upper classes, or what are called the upper classes," Lady Letitia said; "at least, I am sure it is not all their fault. Some of us don't care about what is called class; but the others won't meet us half-way—they won't, indeed, Mr. Romont."

"Don't they sometimes rush to meet you a good deal more than half-way?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"The vulgar rich," Lady Letitia said; "not the poor, never."

"The vulgar rich?" Mrs. Pollen asked, sweetly. "Who are they, now? People like Miss Sabine and myself, for example?"

"Oh, for shame!" Janette exclaimed, turning crimson with anger and agitation.

Mrs. Pollen's was not a pleasant remark, but she did not mean to be particularly pleasant. Lady Letitia's words had been

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unfortunate, and Mrs. Pollen was determined to teach her a lesson on the instant and to make her more cautious for the future. Every one looked at Mrs. Pollen, who met their looks with open and beaming eyes and an expression of the most simple and childlike curiosity.

Lady Letitia coloured, and was going to give some angry reply, and then bethought herself and made silent confession of error and determination to offer atonement. Mr. Lisle looked as if he, for his part, merely asked of the higher powers that the earth might open and swallow him.

"I spoke of the vulgar rich," Lady Letitia said. "There are vulgar rich as well as vulgar poor and vulgar peers. I know some very vulgar peers. I did not speak of educated ladies."

"Of course not, of course not," Mr. Lisle hastily added. "About the way of getting at the poor, now, I confess that I am for myself rather inclined to think——"

"But coming back to these vulgar rich," Camiola said, interrupting him in his praiseworthy endeavour to get away from the unlucky subject. "Can't they be snubbed or chilled off or kept in their places somehow? I should like to have Mr. Romont's opinion on that. He has seen so much of life and all classes of people."

Miss Sabine said this in the spirit of the little boy sung of in "Alice in Wonderland," only to annoy. She knew very well that Lady Letitia never meant to say an unkind thing to any one, and had a very high opinion of her, Camiola. But she still was of opinion that she owed a little grudge to Mr. Romont.

"I think, if Lady Letitia will allow me to say so," Romont replied, "that we all make too much work about the vulgar rich and the new rich, and all that. If we hear that a man has made money rapidly, we take it into our heads that he must be vulgar. I know a man—everybody knows him, at least by name—who has an ancestry that can't be disputed, and fortune and rank and all the rest of it, and he is the vulgarest little cad I ever met."

"I know many such cases," the Rector hastened to declare.

"So do I," Lady Letitia added, "and I class them with the vulgar rich. That was all I meant."

It was not exactly all she had meant; but she told herself now that it was, and she believed it; and every one else professed to do the same. So the vulgar rich were allowed to go their vulgar way, and the talk turned back to the forthcoming festivities.

After a while Romont rose to go.

"Are you going to town?" Mrs. Pollen asked. "I am going to Piccadilly; can I drop you anywhere?"

He accepted her offer readily, the more so because he wanted to talk to her.

"We shall see you soon again?" Lady Letitia said to him.

"To-morrow, if you will allow me. I want to give you all the help I can. You have been very kind to me, Lady Letitia." This he said in a lower tone.

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"Kind?" she said—"to Kitty Romont's son?"

"Well, do you know, I felt a little alarmed at first."

"You looked a little alarmed," Mrs. Pollen said.

"I did not know how you would take me; I thought you might be angry, perhaps, Lady Letitia. I am afraid I was not as careful as I ought to have been in putting the blame for things here on the right shoulders; and so I came in with a certain fear and trembling."

"Almost like Daniel going into the lions' den," Mr. Lisle suggested.

"Or the three going into the fiery furnace," Lady Letitia added with a smile.

"Or Mark Antony going among the conspirators," said Mrs. Pollen.

"Or Moses in the bulrushes," Camiola observed.

"Why Moses in the bulrushes?" Lady Letitia asked.

"I don't know," Camiola replied composedly. "I heard everybody trying an illustration, and I thought I ought to contribute one; I couldn't think of anything else on the spur of the moment."

The little party soon broke up. Romont left on the best possible terms with Lady Letitia and Mr. Lisle, and with a promise to return next day and to lend a hand in all the preparations for the coming entertainments. Mrs. Pollen took him away in her carriage.

"So that is Miss Sabine; that is the rich girl they are bringing out?" he said as they drove away.

"That is Miss Sabine. What do you think of her?"

"I think the Fates have dealt most unfairly and unjustly by her, and I think it's a shame."

"How is that? What have the Fates done?"

"They have given her everything—youth and beauty and money, and all the rest. Is not that unfair to other girls? If she has the money she ought not to have the good looks; and if she has the good looks she doesn't want the money, and it ought to be given to some plain girl. These are my principles. I wish I had the arranging of things."

"She hasn't family," Mrs. Pollen said.

"No, she hasn't family. That's a comfort. I suppose she is dreadfully conceited as it is. If she came of some great old family there would be no standing her."

"You don't seem to like her."

"She didn't seem to like me, I thought."

As they were crossing the bridge within sight of the old churchyard a hansom drove past them; its roof was piled with trunks, and in it was sitting a pale young man with delicate features and quick glancing eyes. He looked at them curiously, and even leaned out of the cab to look after them.

"That must be Lady Letitia's son," Mrs. Pollen said. "He is

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very like Janette. Do you know anything about him? He has just come back from Egypt; he is a soldier."

"No, I don't know anything about him. He seems a delicate sort of lad to be a soldier."

"Perhaps he has come home to marry Miss Sabine," was the suggestion of Mrs. Pollen.

"That fellow?" Romont asked, apparently in surprise.

Mrs. Pollen said nothing; but she smiled and had some thoughts of her own. We are always told—this was one of her thoughts—that only women are jealous of each other and disparage each other, and are suspicious of each other, and all the rest of it; and here is my young philanthropist already at the first glimpse he gets of another young man talking of him as "that fellow," because there is the remotest possibility that he may turn out to be the lover of a girl whom my young philanthropist has seen to-day for the first time in his life, and for whom I suppose he wouldn't admit that he cared a straw. What she said aloud was, "He was looking very pale. I fancy he has been wounded. He will be quite a hero of romance in Fitzurseham, won't he, Mr. Romont?"

"Apparently he has got his heroic renown on easy terms," Romont replied.

Mrs. Pollen was delighted. The little weaknesses of men and women were a source of never-failing interest to her. She liked Bertie Romont all the better in her heart for this little outbreak of jealous feeling.

"Don't think a bit the worse of yourself," she said; "we are all like that. It only shows that you are a man and a brother."

Romont first started, and then laughed.

"You have positively been following my thoughts, Mrs. Pollen. How did you contrive to do that? I was inwardly reproaching myself for a little burst of silly ill-nature."

"Yes; I knew what you were thinking of. Do you like this Chelsea Embankment, with its brand-new red houses?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered somewhat abstractedly.

"I don't think you do, really. I don't. I would rather have the old, tumble-down lanes, and the wooden houses hanging rickety over the water, and the old shipyards with the painted figure-heads projecting their staring eyes over the walls, and the ancient, lop-sided public-houses rotting themselves in ease on Lethe's Wharf."

"But it was so horribly unhealthy."

"No doubt. The picturesque generally is unhealthy. I don't like all the changes going on in London. Can't they let anything alone? Is nothing to be allowed to grow old?"

"Yet you are going to restore Fitzurse House, and make it a new and eligible private residence?"

"I suppose I can't escape the spell of what people call the spirit of the age, and I dare say I shall soon be going in for

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restoration on my own account—powder and paint, and the beautiful-for-ever sort of thing. Do you know, Mr. Romont, I sometimes think there is only one thing on earth worth having."

"What is that?"

"Youth!" she said with energy, her eye lighting up. "Youth! One should never grow old. I often think of Byron's line, 'If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?' Ah, but that was written for a man and by a man! We *have* to live; we women! No land of honourable death for us!"

It was not quite clear what had set Mrs. Pollen thinking of lost youth just now. Perhaps the train of melancholy thought was fired by the words they had spoken about Camiola, and Romont's little ebullition of feeling, inexplicable as it was, against the hero who had come back from the war. Mrs. Pollen said no more on the subject of youth, and Romont, of course, did not prolong the talk. He glanced at her face more than once. The bright sunlight already slanting from the west was a trial to the deepening lines near the mouth, and to the hollows round the eyes. It had been a strikingly handsome face once; and had still a charm that even a young man might acknowledge, in certain lights. But this westering sun was remorseless.

Romont felt stirred by a strange feeling of sympathy, of compassion. "I suppose it is so with women," he thought. "I suppose it must be so. When youth is gone, all is gone."

Mrs. Pollen probably read his thoughts. She began telling him at once of a number of projects she had in her mind and at her heart for the improvement of this, that, and the other thing at Fitzurseham.

"I shall have to say many times to the passing hour—stay, for thou art so fair," she added, with a smile.

He understood the allusion to Faust, and he understood her meaning too. She wished to satisfy him that she was not all as weak as some hasty words might give her out, and that life had much for her even though youth was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

PHANTOMS AND SHADOWS.

"THE dark old place will be gilt by the gold of a millionnaire." Mrs. Pollen was spending her gold freely enough; but not so much to gild the dark old place as to bring out anew the splendour of its ancient gilding. She did not hope to have the old place completely renovated in time for what might be called its housewarming. The entrance hall, the staircase, two large rooms, and two or three smaller apartments were the utmost objects of her present designs. The teas, the suppers, the wines, and the attendants were to be imported straightway from a great West End

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caterer, and all that was asked of Fitzurse House was that it should furnish a decent casket for the reception of the company and the feast. All the old designs and ornamentations were carefully and skilfully brought out anew on walls and roofs. Shepherdesses with sheep, pastors with gilded crooks, which had been hidden for generations in dust and soot, began to simper out upon the living world once more. Goddesses, whose nudity had long been concealed by the protecting web of the modest spider, shone forth again upon the day naked and not ashamed. Ancient tapestries shook off their dust and displayed their dismal imitations of the painter's art. Lights burnt all through the night in Fitzurse House, and the once deserted chambers resounded unceasingly to the work of the busy carpenters and upholsterers and renovators. People who had been passing up the river every night of their lives in the late steamers without knowing there was such a place in existence as Fitzurse House now stared in wonder at the windows whose light streamed across the water. They could hardly believe their eyes, and asked in amazement what place that was, and why it was lighted up now, having never been lighted up before. The popular mind of Fitzurseham was nearly as much astonished and agitated as the mind of the sultan in Aladdin's story when he woke up one morning and saw the palace of his son-in-law standing in all but perfect completeness just opposite his own.

"I should like to spend a whole night here," said Mrs. Pollen one evening to her faithful henchman, Christian Pilgrim.

"Yes, madame," the faithful henchman said, and he inclined his head in the attitude of one who deferentially awaits explanation. He was in the habit of spending every night in the house, and had been so for many years, and it did not seem to him to be an experience likely to have great interest for the outsiders.

"I mean when the workmen were all gone; and no one was in the house but myself; not even you, Mr. Pilgrim. I feel sure that after the darkness had set in all round, and in the house as well—for I wouldn't have any lights of my own—I should find the place illuminated with the mild beams of innumerable wax candles, and should see a stately company filling the great rooms and crowding the staircases, and flirting in the corners and corridors. They would come to the doors in noiseless carriages; and the gentlemen would wear gorgeous full-bottomed wigs and carry swords, and the ladies would have vast hoops and patches, and would play with their fans after the most coquettish fashion described by the *Spectator*. I should not dare to mingle with such a company, for if they saw me all would vanish; but I should peep from my concealment behind a curtain somewhere and see the movements of their dance and perhaps catch some words of their dainty discourse. Would not that be delightful, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Not for me, madame. I should have no sympathy with those courtly shadows. I should feel that they would never have cared

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for me, and they would only drive away my own special shadows and phantoms which people the place for me."

"What shadows are these, Mr. Pilgrim, if I may ask? I don't want to know if you don't quite wish to tell me."

She was always unaffected, always herself, when speaking to Mr. Pilgrim.

"Shadows, madame, of all the people and things I have not known, and always wanted to know. Shadows of youth, and—and——"

"And of beauty, Mr. Pilgrim? Why not?"

"And of beautiful people, madame; and of friends, and of children, and of honourable ambition gratified, and of affectionate hopes realized. All that sort of thing."

"Mr. Pilgrim, were you ever young?"

He shook his head and answered gravely, "Never, madame; never."

"Then you must have your youth before you—the best of your life, I mean. Take my word for it, the best is to come. You are young enough in years, and I am sure there is a good time coming for you yet. There isn't for *me;* but that's a different thing. I had my chances, and I didn't make everything of them. But I don't find, from what you tell me and what I guess, that you ever had a chance at all. Now, I am sure you deserve better than this, and so I feel good hope that you will have it. Anyhow, you said the first day I spoke to you that you had only one friend in the world, didn't you—the time when young Romont came in?"

"I did, madame."

"Could you say that now?"

He was for a moment hardly able to speak, out of very gratefulness. His lips moved spasmodically. At last he said—

"I believe—I know—that I have a friend in you, madame, a true friend; and I thank Heaven—and you."

"Come," she said, in a cheerful tone, "that is something. You see, things are improving. Better things will come for you, I am sure. You will grow young, and you will fall in love, and you will find happiness, perhaps, when, where, and how you least expect it. Well, I am going now; I shall be back early in the morning. I leave you to your phantoms for the present; but I hope they will begin soon to vanish and give place to substances, to good things, hope realized, and all that."

Mrs. Pollen had seen the expression that passed over Pilgrim's face when she talked of his falling in love, and she augured well for it. She was thinking of the pretty girl to whom he taught shorthand. "I don't see why that should not be brought about," she said to herself.

Pilgrim had spoken truly to Mrs. Pollen. He had never been young; at least, he had never been a young man. He had been first a child, and then an elderly man. Boyhood and youth he had not known. He had crossed their frontier lines unconsciously, as

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one asleep in a railway train traverses a country at night. The years which ought to have been boyish he had consumed in working hard for his living, and in studying with passionate zeal meanwhile; rising unnaturally early and sitting up unnaturally late. for the sake of the reading, which was the best of life to him. He found himself once laid up with illness in a provincial town, and the daughter of the woman in whose house he lodged nursed him and was kind to him, and she was a pretty girl—a sort of pretty girl; and he felt grateful to her, and thought he was in love with her. He married her, and soon found that he had married a worthless little creature with a shrewish tongue and an insatiable thirst for flattery and flirtation. There was no harm in her, however, he thought, and he put up with her ways and was a good husband to her, and worked harder than ever to keep her in dress and in little comforts, and he spent every spare moment with her, although they had not two ideas in common. They had children, but the children all died, and the house was very lonely. It was made more lonely still, and much more dreary for him, when his wife's mother came and lived with them. The mother and daughter were incessantly quarrelling, and used to insist on his hearing out the whole story of each successive quarrel. Once the mother lost her self-control and her sense of decency so far as to make a vile charge against her own daughter in the presence and to the face of that daughter's husband. The mother screamed out that the daughter had been badly conducted long before she had married Pilgrim. Upon this he insisted that the mother must leave his house at once and for ever; and he had his way. He never saw her again. He never spoke one word to his wife concerning her mother's odious statement. Whether he believed there was any foundation for it or not his wife never knew. Certainly her manner was ever after more quiet and self-restrained and conciliating to him than it had been before. They lived on, to all appearance not unhappily. At last the wife died, and he was sorry for her; sorry for himself, for his loneliness, for his lost youth, for her wasted youth and barren life; sorry when he thought of what she might have been under different conditions. Perhaps he would have been less sorry if he could have looked back on her with pure unalloyed affection; if she could have remained in his memory as the ideal wife of his youth; if he could have thought of his married years with sweet and tender regret. After a while his regrets, such as they were, settled down to a mere sediment at the bottom of his life's quiet pool. He awoke to the perception of the fact that he was now a prematurely old man; that the time of youth had long since gone by, and that he never had been young. He was forty-four years old, and looked still older than that. The world had nothing more for him, he thought; all was over but the dying; it did not matter when that came.

After a while, however, he became conscious of a strange bewildering sensation growing stronger and stronger within him.

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It was as if in late autumn the sap were to flow anew in some withered branch, and quicken it into the vitality of spring once more and out of time. He found that his heart was still young, still full of youth's most exquisite feeling; was capable of love, was longing and straining for love. He knew now that he never had loved before, and he felt, with something like terror in the feeling, that he was certain to fall in love. It was the strangest sensation, this lighting up of late passion in premature old age. Well he knew that there was no human creature in all the land or in all the world that loved him, or was likely to love him. He was sensitive to an almost extravagant degree, and he trembled at the absurdity of the position in which he might be placed if his passion were to take shape, were to centre itself in some one woman—he, at his time of life, to fall in love, and let his folly be seen! Sweet, poetic, and charming in a Cherubino is the sentiment that yearns to be in love with some woman, any woman, to be in love for the sake of being in love. But oh, how unspeakably ridiculous it would be in an ancient or even elderly Dr. Bartolo! There were times when Pilgrim could have cursed himself for the existence of this feeling which was day by day becoming stronger and stronger within him. There were times and moods when in sober seriousness he wished he were safely dead. It was as if a living soul were to be imprisoned in a dead body, thus to feel the emotions of youth, the emotions that his youth had never known, now flushing the feeble veins of age.

Feeble! Was he feeble? More than once he grimly tested his strength, and found that he was physically stronger now than he ever had been in his youth or his prime. Sometimes he said to himself impetuously, "I am not old; I will not admit that I am old. After all, I am not yet quite forty-five—that is not old. Why shouldn't I fall in love and marry again if I like, and if I can find any one to love me?" This thought always brought him back to his sober self and made him smile bitterly at his outbreak of folly. He looked in the glass and saw his white hair, his grey beard, his deep-lined and bloodless face, his stooping shoulders, and he asked himself, "What woman on earth could think of me as anything but an old man? I must only grin and bear it," he said. "I am old and I never was young; I am unlike the Psalmist in that respect, at all events." He went about like a man with a terrible secret. The sight, the name, the thought of a woman frightened him; in the approach of any woman there was a possible discovery for his weakness and an exposure of him to the ridicule which it deserved. For he saw only too clearly that it did deserve ridicule: he ridiculed it himself with quite merciless deliberate scorn. He analyzed his own folly with chill unsparing study; he did not leave one scrap or rag of self-delusion to cover it. He left it naked and ashamed, but it would not die of shame. It lived and thrived and grew stronger day by day. His only hope was that the woman, the one woman, might never come.

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Meantime some changes had taken place in the domestic life of the Lisle family. Young Georgie Lisle had come home, and he had been wounded. He had had a thrust of an Arab spear in the neck; he got it not in one of the big encounters, but in a sudden and casual skirmish. It was not a very bad business in itself, but Georgie Lisle was never a robust youth, and his commander thought it better to send him home. Home he came, having managed to conceal from his people any knowledge of what had happened until he was able to show himself in bodily presence among them, and thus assure them that he had not any dangerous hurt. He was, of course, the hero and the idol of his mother and his sisters; of all the girls, in fact. Camiola petted him and attended to him just as devotedly as either of the other two girls. He was, in appearance, like his sister Janette; he was not much taller, or, to all outward seeming, much stronger than she. His mother watched him with a tender anxiety, different from that of any one else, unknown to any one else. She kept some of her thoughts on this subject even from her husband; but she did in heart wish, oh, so fervently, that her son had not come back to his home and his country until Camiola Sabine had got safely married and out of the way. She did not believe he was at all the sort of man with whom Camiola would be likely to fall in love; she dreaded his falling in love with Camiola, and she shuddered at the bare idea of its being said that she had abused her position as the caretaker of a girl of fortune by trying to make a match between the heiress and her son.

Another change was caused by the frequent visits of Kitty Romont's son. Bertie Romont was of inestimable value in helping Lady Letitia and Mrs. Pollen in everything. It must not be supposed that the Lisles limited their exertions on behalf of the poorer people of Fitzurseham to the getting up of bazaars and concerts. They went about incessantly, sometimes all day long, among the worst of the dens and lairs where poverty is transfigured by daily friction into vice. Many a time Lady Letitia confessed that her heart would have sunk within her for sheer despair if it were not for the never-failing courage and good spirits and hopefulness with which Albert Romont confronted every difficulty and flung defiance in the face of despair.

The young women did not take much part in these expeditions; the lighter duties of charity and beneficence belonged to them; and therefore Romont saw comparatively little of them. His first conversation with Camiola began somewhat oddly. Lady Letitia and he and the young women were bustling about doing something connected with the grand event of the approaching festivities. Lady Letitia suddenly said, "Where is Camiola? Somebody call Camiola."

Now Romont had accustomed himself to be the somebody who was to volunteer every service, and without giving himself a moment to think about what he was doing he called out, "Camiola, Camiola!" in ringing tenor that all too soon reached Camiola's

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ears. She had left Lady Letitia for a moment to talk to Georgie Lisle, who seemed to her to look rather lonely on the lawn. Lady Letitia saw her and wanted her back, for various reasons. Camiola ran across the lawn and sprang in at the low window which was open. Girls do not always look well when running, but Camiola did look well, and as she sprang lightly into the room she was a living picture of youth and health and active womanhood. She had hardly noticed who called her, until she saw Romont's embarrassed face. He then became aware that "Camiola" was none other than Miss Sabine, the young lady with the large fortune.

"I am sure I beg your pardon a thousand times," he said. "I really didn't know at the moment; I didn't stop to think."

Camiola was a little vexed. For a moment her usually sweet temper gave way. "Perhaps you thought you were calling Lady Letitia's maid," she said saucily, and giving him a defiant look.

"I didn't think anything; and I beg your pardon again."

"My name is Miss Sabine," said the young lady. "He is presumptuous," she thought to herself, "because he is Kitty Romont's son—whoever Kitty Romont is—and because he knows that I am not of Kitty Romont's class."

"She is a self-conceited, purse-proud young woman," he thought, "and I understand her now." His composure was quite restored. "Your name isn't Miss Sabine, if you come to that," he said good-humouredly. "'Miss' isn't a name, so far as I understand. It is a title, I suppose."

"I have nothing to do with titles," Camiola answered. "I am a plebeian; but I am called Miss Sabine, all the same;" and at the same moment she said to her own heart, "If I were called Miss Fool for going on in this way I should very well deserve that title." She was angry with herself, and therefore angry with Romont.

"What are you two talking about?" Lady Letitia asked.

"Miss Sabine is vowing eternal enmity to me because I called her 'Camiola.' Won't you protect me, Lady Letitia?"

"I think you are very well able to protect yourself. But why did you call her Camiola, if she doesn't like it?"

"I didn't know who 'Camiola' was."

"That makes it worse," said Camiola.

"So it does," said Lady Letitia. "But you will forgive him dear, won't you? And he must never call you 'Camiola' again."

"Never again—hear me swear," Romont declared gravely.

Camiola inclined her head. He was laughing at her, she thought; and she also thought it served her right.

The incident was not quite *vidé*, according to the French phrase. When Camiola afterwards went back to Georgie Lisle, she found him very angry.

"Why do you allow that man to call you by your name?" he asked pettishly.

"I don't allow him; he did it in mistake; without thinking. But he will not do it again."

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"I detest him!" said Georgie, emphatically.

"But, Georgie, my dear boy, every one likes him. He is a splendid fellow, although he did call me 'Camiola' by mistake."

"I don't see anything splendid about him. What has he done? Disguised himself as a house-painter, I believe; nothing very great in that, surely."

"But you must remember what he did it for."

"Did it to get talked about, I dare say. He seems mad with self-conceit."

"Oh, come now, Georgie, I don't think he is self-conceited at all. You are very unfair to him."

"I think it is you who are unfair. You seem to adore the man; all of you, I mean."

"I never saw you so unreasonable or in such a temper before. I often heard that men can't bear to hear other men praised, and I do believe it is true."

"I don't like him; but you know that I don't object to hearing men praised when they deserve it."

Camiola laughed. "And they say men are reasonable, and women are unreasonable. You don't object to hearing men praised when they deserve it; that is to say, when you think they deserve it. Every man would say that, I suppose; and yet it leaves my general proposition exactly where it was."

"He thinks he knows a great deal too much," Georgie said, sticking tenaciously to his point. "He contradicted me yesterday about something in Egypt; in this very campaign; and I was there, and he wasn't."

"But didn't it turn out that he was right, Georgie, and that you were mistaken?"

"Of course you think everything he says and does is right," Georgie grumbled.

"I am in luck to-day," Camiola said, good-humouredly. "He is rude to me on the one side, and you are rude to me on the other. I shan't stay with you any longer, Georgie; I'll come back when you are in a better humour. No; I am not angry with you, silly boy; but I don't like you to be silly. I must go now; Lady Letitia wants me. It is she who calls 'Camiola' this time."

Camiola was sorry for Georgie. He appeared to her to have very little indeed of the hero in him, except that courage which every man can call up when occasion needs. But she reflected that he was sickly, that he was still suffering from the effects of his wound; that he was distressed because he had to come back prematurely from the campaign, and she found various other qualifying conditions telling in his favour or his excuse. He certainly did not show to advantage by the side of Romont. He was not much younger than Romont, and yet he seemed like a peevish child sometimes when brought into comparison with the bright, brave, self-reliant young man, who never appeared to know a moment's doubt or hesitation or ill-humour or despondency. Somehow,

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even the soldier's wound did not seem heroic in poor Georgie Lisle.

Lady Letitia and Janette came out on the lawn; Mr. Lisle presently came hurrying after them.

"I am going for a ride with Romont; I shan't be more than an hour, if anybody calls," he said.

"My dear," said Lady Letitia, "if I were you I wouldn't ride with Mr. Romont; he looks so well on horseback."

Lady Letitia was very fond of her husband, and had always been an excellent helpmate to him. But she nevertheless liked to chaff him in a certain good-humoured way, and would even turn him into ridicule before his face without thinking any harm, or supposing that she was detracting in any way from the reverence due to his position in the Church. He was fond of riding, but he certainly never did look well on horseback; his legs did not seem to take hold. He was fond of lawn tennis and other genteel and innocent games, but he played very badly, and put people out. He was fond of talking with bright, clever girls, and Lady Letitia frequently disturbed and bewildered him by laughingly insisting that he was carrying on a flirtation. Lady Letitia had had the good or bad fortune to have a father and brothers who could do everything well, and whose clothes always looked well on them; and she could not resist the temptation now and then to contrast their ways with the ways of her husband. Moreover, Lady Letitia came of a great old family, rich with titles since ever so long before the Conqueror, while her husband's father was the first peer of the name, and got his peerage because he had been a dull and successful lawyer, whom it was convenient for his party to turn into a Lord Chancellor. The well-assured conviction which Lady Letitia so often expressed, that the days of aristocracy in England were over, did not by any means prevent her from feeling, and often giving utterance to, a pride in the knowledge that she came of a really aristocratic family, not one of whom had ever known what it was to earn a living.

"Oh, I don't mind," Mr. Lisle said. "So long as one doesn't fall off, what matter how he looks—at my time of life?"

"I don't think Romont rides particularly well," said Georgie. "I should like to see how he would look on a camel."

"You may be sure he has ridden camels scores of times, Georgie," said Mr. Lisle.

"At the Zoo, perhaps," Georgie suggested. "I should like to see him gallop a camel as these Bedouin fellows do, and turn the beast right round when at the very top of his speed. I should like to seem him do that."

"Can you do that, Georgie dear?" asked little Alice, gazing on her brother with eyes of wonder and admiration.

"That isn't the question, Alice. We were not talking about what I could do; but what he could do."

"Well, he can do a great many things," Lady Letitia said;

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"that's certain. So could his mother, Kitty Romont, before she became Kitty Romont. When we were at school she could do everything, and I couldn't do anything. Good gracious, what a stupid girl I was!"

"Perhaps she has changed too," said the Rector.

Lady Letitia smiled at the delicately insinuated compliment to the more matured condition of her own intellect.

"I am very much disappointed with Mr. Romont," Janette said, and she shook her little grave head with the air of one whose former idol is so utterly broken that it would not be worth while even to try to pick up the pieces.

Georgie looked gratefully at his sister.

"Why disappointed, Janette?" her father asked.

"Because he is not enthusiastic. He doesn't seem to have one thrill of what I call enthusiasm in him; he doesn't believe in the greatness of the present age; he has no real sympathy with its noblest hopes. He does not believe in the coming of a time when all class distinctions and social distinctions are to be levelled, and men and women are to be brothers and sisters. I was much more impressed by Mr. Walter Fitzurse."

"Oh, well, Fitzurse!" Mr. Lisle said hastily. "He's a good-looking young fellow enough, and I am told he is very clever; but I shouldn't have thought there was much of the enthusiast about *him*."

"Papa, you haven't talked much to him."

"No, Janette dear; there you have the advantage of me; for I could see that you talked a good deal to him yesterday, and that he talked a good deal to you."

"I think I like him," Lady Letitia said, "for the sake of the great old family he belongs to. I think he is like the portraits of some of them, and like the bust in the church."

Mr. Lisle did not usually say disparaging things of anybody, but he winced occasionally under the not infrequent allusions to great old families, and he could not keep from saying, "As to that, Letitia, I am told by those who ought to know that he has no more to do with that family than you and I have——"

"*We* have something to do with it," Lady Letitia interposed calmly. "Our family intermarried with theirs in the fifteenth century; and I think there had been an earlier intermarriage too."

"I'll say my family, then, and stick to the ground where I know I am safe. I'm told he has no more connection with the historic Fitzurses than I have."

"I should be delighted to think so," Janette said, gravely; "I should like him much better if he had sprung from the people. But I am afraid, papa, you are mistaken. I think you will find he does come from that family, once so famous for its oppression, lately for its vices, and more lately still for the ruin brought upon it by its own prodigality."

"Why, Janette, you are the most eloquent of Social Democrats,"

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her father declared, with eyes wide opening, and a good-natured, amused smile.

"Henry George is not in it with Janette, I should say," Lady Letitia remarked, looking by no means particularly delighted.

"But why do you think I am mistaken, Janette?"

"Well, because—I think—he told me—that he comes of the old Fitzurse family."

"Oh, as to that, from all I can hear——" And Mr. Lisle was about to add something highly disparaging to the value of any statement coming from the lips of the modern Fitzurse, when he pulled up in time, and remembered that it could hardly be right to disparage any one's character on hearsay.

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER FITZURSE.

In one of the wider streets of Fitzurseham there stands a row of small houses, set a little back from the road. These houses are lower down than the level of the street; their foundations have perhaps for some time been going through the unsatisfactory process which is described as "settling;" sinking, that is to say, unevenly down into the soil. Between them and the street is an enclosure, marked off by a rotten fence, or paling. What to call the enclosure is not easy to determine. No doubt the original purpose of the builder was to make it a front garden; but the man who could cast his eyes upon it now, and think of a garden, must have a mind ruled by the oddest laws of association. It is simply a little damp oozy patch of waste, bearing nothing more like to flowers than a few ragged stinted leaves of discoloured grass, and having for its principal ornaments a few old shoes, some scraps of paper, a cork or two, a mouldering tin canister that once held Australian meat, and a few broken bottles.

One of these houses might attract the eye and at first puzzle the mind of a passing stranger by the peculiar import of the inscription on a sign-board which it displays on its front. The sign-board announces that the occupant of the house is a "morning callman," and that he calls persons "at twopence the call or sixpence the week." It might seem surprising that any one in Fitzurseham could have a motive for early rising strong enough to induce him to pay twopence for being called, unless, indeed, he were promised a means of escape from the place for ever on condition he proved himself equal to getting out of bed at some given hour next morning. Even then one would think that such a person would lie awake all night rather than pay the twopence.

About the time at which we have arrived in this story, Walter Fitzurse was passing the door of the morning callman one bright and beautiful evening. Walter Fitzurse was the young man whose democratic fervour had impressed Janette Lisle. Young Fitzurse

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was not exactly a handsome man, but he was decidedly what would be called distinguished-looking; he was a man upon whom well-made clothes showed to great advantage. There was a curious blending of self-conceit and shyness in his manner. Fitzurseham in general did not like him. He held his head too high, people said; and for no particular reason that any one could see. He had lived all his life in the place, and he hardly ever spoke to any of the aboriginal inhabitants if he could avoid it. He must have been miserably poor, and yet he always contrived to be well dressed. He was never known to have committed an excess of any kind; he did not care about drinking, or smoking, or flirting, for it was understood that his "keeping company," as it was called, with a pretty girl of the locality was something more than flirtation —was a regular engagement to end in marriage as soon as Walter could find some way of making a living. He had been a brilliant success at the foundation school, and had carried off various prizes and rewards at middle-class examinations. Rumour even said that he was able to keep himself thus far by the money he got in that way. Fitzurseham did not like him, but was very proud of him; and had already determined that Walter Fitzurse was destined to get on and make a great name in the world.

Fitzurse came slowly along the street. One of the complaints which the people made of him was that he walked as if the street belonged to him. He had unquestionably something of this in his manner just now. He looked about him with a lordly, patronizing air, as of one who surveys his property to see if everything is right and in good order. This grandeur of deportment was considerably enhanced by the fact that Walter wore an eye-glass and kept it almost constantly in his eye, accomplishing this feat without the slightest wrinkle or shade of a grimace. He was in a particularly happy mood this day, and he was anxious to communicate his happiness to some one. There was, indeed, a "some one" who had a claim to early communication of any glad tidings he might have to impart, but the opportunity, although close at hand, had not yet arrived, as anybody might have guessed who observed his frequent glances at his watch. He was passing the door of the morning callman when an idea appeared to strike him. He stopped for a moment, then went on a few paces, stopped again, finally turned back resolutely and went up to the door of the house and gave a resounding knock. The door was opened by the morning callman himself, who made a profound obeisance not altogether in the true spirit of deference to his visitor.

"Oh, Merridew, I say, would you be kind enough to call me at six o'clock every morning for the week? I wish particularly to be called, I sleep so late. I am not in the habit of getting up early."

Jethro Merridew, the morning callman, was one of the characters or oddities of the neighbourhood. He was an odd person to look at. Those who remembered him long, knew that he must

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be at least sixty years old, and might be much older; but he did not look anything like fifty. He was a short man, with a curiously well-preserved pink-and-white face, and glittering shallow blue eyes. He had yellow hair, which he wore very long, and falling in curling lengths down on his shoulders and on the back of his coat, like a cavalier of the time of the Stuarts out of date or inappropriately clad. His custume never varied. He wore a faded blue cut-away coat, buttoned with one button over a white waistcoat, and black trousers with natty black stockings and dancing shoes underneath. It is not surprising that a get-up like this, worn without regard for time, season, or place, should have started in the popular mind of Fitzurseham a prevailing doubt as to the sanity of Mr. Merridew. Nor was this popular doubt discouraged by the fact that Mr. Merridew had apparently an immense opinion of himself, his knowledge, and his intellect. He loved to pour forth the treasures of his poetical and other reading without due consideration for the receptive capacity or even the sympathy of his audience; and indeed, he not infrequently accompanied his portentous displays of erudition with an expression of the most utter contempt for the faculties or the good opinion of the particular person whom he was then endeavouring to enlighten. But the weakest of all his weak points was, in the opinion of his neighbours—he had no friends—some absurd notions he had got into his head about a daughter whom he had or believed he had, and who was now lost in some way. This daughter he always said would come back to him some day a great lady. He was always preparing for the girl's return; he read and studied, he assured every one, in order to be properly up to the level of his daughter and her highly educated circle of friends. When she came, of course he would have to go and live in the West End, probably Park Lane or Berkeley Square, he thought; and a man must be properly read up to make a becoming figure in the society to be met with in these exclusive regions. Had he ever a daughter? Some people said he never had; that he was an old bachelor. On the other hand, no one now in Fitzurseham could remember him for more than a few years—he had only migrated or drifted into the place; and he might have had any number of daughters, for aught they knew, before that time. But if he ever had a daughter, and she had suddenly gone away from him, as he said she had, the general opinion of Fitzurseham would not have been that she was likely to return to him metamorphosed into a fine lady. Her fate would have seemed to most persons likely to be something very different, at once tragic and commonplace. Mr. Merridew did not live merely on the profits of his profession of morning callman. Fitzurseham was hardly active and anxious enough in its habits to allow a man to amass much of a fortune by "rousing each caitiff to his task of care—of sinful man the sad inheritance." He was principally occupied in collecting the rents of small houses, and he did his business, it was said, always methodically and well.

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"Wherefore this sudden burst of early rising, oh, my young bird? What earlier worm would you devour?"

"I don't want to devour anything; I want to practise for a few days. I am to take part in the concert."

"What concert; the Concert of Europe?"

"A charitable concert at Lady Lisle's," said the young man, bringing out the name of the lady with a certain blending of pride and shyness.

"Lady Lisle; who's she?"

"You old fool, you know very well; the Rector's lady, of course. What other lady is there here?"

"I see. You mean Lady Letitia Lisle. You are an ignorant young man, although you think you know a great deal. Lady Lisle and Lady Letitia Lisle are not by any means equivalent terms, let me tell you. If you are getting into swell society you ought to learn something of the ways of the aristocracy. Nothing is so awful as to make a mistake in the titles of these people. It stamps a man. Always come to me when you want to know anything of that kind. I have made all that a study. And, listen here, if you are talking to any person of real position in society, don't you go using such expressions as the 'Rector's lady.' Always say the Rector's wife; and leave the Rector's lady to the Rector's lady's-maid."

Fitzurse tried to seem as though he were not annoyed; but he was annoyed. Mr. Merridew's criticism had hit a blot.

"Well, you'll call me at all events, Merridew."

"Yes; I'll call you. 'If you're waking, call me early.' Do you admire the Laureate? 'Call it not vain—they do not err.' That's Scott—Sir Walter—they don't read him now. *I* do. 'Call spirits from the vasty deep.' That's the Immortal Bard. They don't read *him* now, either; but they say they do. 'Call up him who left untold the story of Cambuscan bold;' that's Milton. They say they admire him, but they don't. Shall I go any further with the calls?"

"Not on my account, thank you, Merridew, I'm sure. Much obliged for the specimen of your reading in the poets."

"Merridew? Merridew? And why not now, Mr. Merridew? Lady Letitia Lisle—Lady Lisle you would call her; or perhaps I should say you would have called her—always addresses me as Mr. Merridew. Mrs. Pollen, the great rich woman that's having Fitzurse House done up for her—she wrote me a note, and she addressed me as 'Dear Mr. Merridew.' A word to the wise, eh?—only, God bless me! there is not much of the wise about you. So you are invited to Lady Letitia's? Well, well! What is this world coming to?"

"Do you know Mrs. Pollen?" Walter asked the question with seeming carelessness, taking no account of Mr. Merridew's somewhat disparaging observation on the probable destiny of the world.

"Know her? Of course I know her. She was good enough

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to express a wish that I should be introduced to her. Now there is a real lady for you!"

Fitzurse smiled quietly. He had been given to understand that, whatever else Mrs. Pollen might be, she was not exactly a real lady, and he was amused at poor Merridew's words. Mr. Merridew saw the quiet smile, and was made angry by it.

"Of course, you are a great authority on the ways of the higher classes, Merridew," Walter observed, still with the smile.

"I am, sir," Merridew said, blazing out into wrath as sudden as a fire of straw. "I am, and I have a right to be. I study the ways of the higher classes that I may be fit for their society when it is the will of Providence to call me among them."

"Oh yes, I know; when your daughter comes back in a carriage of mother-of-pearl drawn by eight milk-white horses. We know all about that, Merridew, my boy."

"Who are you, sir, that talks in this way about me and my daughter? Ain't you the son of the old copying clerk who used to get drunk at the Old Ferry Inn yonder?"

"Come, Mr. Merridew, you are getting scurrilous."

"Ain't you keeping company with poor old Mrs. Lammas's daughter?—unless, perhaps, you mean to chuck the girl up now because you've been asked for once to meet women of rank. It would be just like you! You call yourself Fitzurse, and you pretend you are one of the old Fitzurse family—which you are as much as I am. Why, you never had a grandfather, and your father only borrowed the name of Fitzurse. My daughter will be a lady when thou liest howling!"

Walter had left the place in contemptuous silence, while Merridew was still pouring forth all his eloquence of denunciation. Even after the morning callman had shut out the world by returning to his house and closing his door with a bang, he still kept on relieving his mind at the expense of Fitzurse, Fitzurse's name, family connections, person, character, and social prospects. Walter went his way and walked slowly along the road that led to the river and the old churchyard upon its bank. One of the smaller gates of the churchyard was open, and he went in. It was a soft evening of a summer not yet advanced into heat. The sky was silvery grey towards the horizon; grey-blue overhead. The faint sun was sinking behind silver-edged clouds. The place was lonely. The young man sat on the low wall and looked to where on clearer evenings the spires and domes of London could be seen.

"How can one live in this accursed place?" he said audibly, "and see London so near?" Then he looked anxiously back across the churchyard as if afraid that some one might have heard his words. There was no one there as yet but himself. He was evidently expecting some one. He looked at his watch. "Past the time," he said; "distinctly past the time. Nearly five minutes late." As he was uttering the words he heard the gate open softly and close again, and he heard the sound of feet coming towards

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where he was seated. He did not get up; he remained just as he was, and affected to be buried in thought and to have heard no sound until a girl ran up to him and put her hand upon his shoulder.

"You naughty boy! you did not come to the gate to me; you sat there thinking and thinking, and I dare say not thinking of *me* one bit. No, nonsense; don't—I won't, Walter; you ridiculous thing."

Miss Vinnie, or Vincentia, Lammas was a decidedly pretty girl. She had dark curly hair and twinkling eyes, and a particularly winsome little mouth and chin. She was dressed neatly—what Fitzurseham would have called genteelly; but the experienced eye would have detected the fatal evidences of poverty about the very neatness of her attire. There was something pathetic in the little worn gloves, frayed at the finger-ends; and one could almost imagine a highly sympathetic creature being touched to the heart by the little boots which were going down slightly on one side. Miss Vinnie herself did not appear to be thinking of these things or of anything that would diminish her good spirits. Her eyes danced with pleasure as she came up to her lordly lover, who was indeed impatient for her coming, but chiefly because he wanted to tell her his good news.

They began walking up and down the churchyard along the line of the river wall. Much of their talk turned on the approaching concert, to which Vinnie had, of course, been invited. She was well known to Lady Letitia, who always spoke of her as "a nice, respectable little girl—the daughter of a very proper, decent mother." Vinnie was beginning to make some suggestions to her lover about the time he was to call for her to take her to the concert; and here now was the opportunity for Walter to tell her his piece of good news. He had been longing for the chance; and now he let it out with the most careless and casual manner as if it were something hardly worth the telling.

"Well, the truth is, I couldn't very well take you in any case, because I shan't be going at the same time. Lady Lisle—Lady Letitia"—he suddenly bethought him of Mr. Merridew's correction—"has asked me—has been kind enough to ask me to dinner that day—and of course I suppose I must go," he added, with heroic attempt to appear more or less indifferent on the subject.

"Asked you to dinner? Lady Letitia? Oh, you lucky, lucky boy! I say, Walter, how I do envy you! Fancy—dining there with all these swell women."

"Yes; very kind of her, wasn't it? I suppose I must go?"

"Go? Why, of course you must go—what else would you think of doing? I feel quite proud, Walter, to know such a grand young man. I say, you must look your very best. We must get mamma to throw her whole soul into the shirt question for that occasion—and you must let me make you a present of a pair of gloves. I want you to look splendid. I hope there will be other young men there—young swells—a lot of them."

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"Why do you hope that, Vinnie?"

"You goose, can't you guess? Why, of course, in order that you may look so much handsomer, and cut them all out with the ladies, and make them awfully jealous. I know there won't be any of them half so handsome. I *must* give you the gloves."

"I rather think, my dear girl, gloves are not worn now by gentlemen at dinner-parties."

"Oh, well, you must have gloves, anyhow; and if you don't see any of the swells putting them on, you can keep yours for another time. You are sure to do whatever is right—you have the way of it always. Mamma says it runs in your family. I'm sure it don't run in hers or mine. Walter, I am so delighted."

Now perhaps, on the whole, this way of taking his news was a little disappointing to Walter. He was afraid at first that the girl would be displeased, or jealous, or alarmed at the thought of his going into this inner circle of brilliant society without her. He had not expected anything of the childlike and simple joy with which she had heard of his invitation. Her way of taking it was a relief, to be sure, in one sense; but in his heart he would have liked her to be a little jealous and frightened. He had hopes of giving her just a little pain and alarm; or impressing her practically and effectively with a sense of his superiority and of the social distance which must be growing greater and greater between them. It spoiled all this when she received his news with mere delight and pride.

"I suppose I shall meet Miss Sabine," he said; "I have not seen her yet. They say she is very rich and very handsome."

"She's awfully handsome. I saw her at church on Sunday; and so is Miss Lisle, I think. Don't you attempt to make love to either of these swell ladies, Walter—or do, if you like, my dear, I shan't be jealous; only I hope they won't make love to you; that would be more serious, wouldn't it?"

Apparently there was no making this girl jealous.

"I have talked to Miss Lisle," he said. "She is very nice and very clever. We agree in many of our opinions on social questions."

"Do you really? Why, Walter, I never knew that you had any opinions on social questions. What are social questions? Why don't you ever talk to me about social questions? I am not clever, I suppose; I couldn't understand. Is that it, you self-conceited boy? And you know Miss Lisle already? Where did you see her?"

"I saw her at her house. I have been to call there, once or twice. She talks to me a good deal. They are very easy to get on with, these aristocratic women, I find."

"And you never told me you had been there or met her," Vinnie said, with a certain distinct reproachfulness in her manner, as if now for the first time she did begin to entertain a misgiving.

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"Didn't I tell you before? I must have forgotten. Oh yes; I was there. They were all very kind."

"Miss Sabine; did you see Miss Sabine?"

"No. I told you I haven't seen Miss Sabine yet. I am very anxious to see her. Janette Lisle speaks very highly of her."

"Is Janette Lisle Miss Lisle, Walter?"

"Yes, Vinnie; the eldest Miss Lisle. Janette is her name. Very pretty name, don't you think?"

"Yes," said the girl, rather blankly. A chill had come over her. Walter had not accomplished his purpose of making her jealous; but he had made her uncomfortable. She had not the faintest idea of distrusting him; but she began to distrust herself. How could she ever look well in his eyes, after those eyes had been accustomed to gaze on girls like Miss Sabine and Miss Lisle? He was much too good for her in any case; but up to this time he had hardly seen any girl but her.

Now, however, that Walter saw he had made her uneasy he was satisfied with himself, and he set to work to restore her spirits and her confidence in herself again. This was easily done. He talked to her pettingly and lovingly, and she thought she had never seen him look so noble and splendid, and had never heard his voice sound more sweetly. His caressing words had a new charm to her because of the knowledge that he had spoken to great ladies and found favour with them. There was no one near, the churchyard was lonely save for those two, and as they walked up and down Walter kept his arm round the girl's waist. When the skies began to deepen, and it was time for Vinnie to go home, he took her in his arms, and looking cautiously round to see that there were no observers near, he kissed her lips. This seemed to be the recognized signal for their leaving the churchyard. Vinnie put up her lips for the kiss. Then they passed out of the gate, and from self-confessed lovers became an ordinary pair of wayfarers again. Walter walked with her to her door, and left her in a condition almost tearful for very pride and happiness.

Walter Fitzurse had lived all his life in the region where we find him. His father and mother had long been dead. In a lonely way the boy grew up to be a man. He was intensely self-conscious, as one usually is who has spent his early years in such a place and such a manner. He was vain and ambitious. He yearned and pined for worldly success, and, above all, for social distinction. He had convinced himself that he was destined for success in that way, and fed in his loneliness on the assurance of what the future had in store for him. His favourite heroes were "Vivian Grey" and one or two of Balzac's brilliant adventurers. He had some capacity, he was clever, he could do most things well when he gave his mind to them, but he had not as yet done anything especially well. If he had been brought up at some great public school, or had any opportunity of mixing much with other boys, he would have had his measure taken, he would have had his unwholesome-

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self-conceit reduced in its dimensions, and perhaps he would, as a result, have applied himself steadily to some one pursuit and won distinction in it. But there were very few boys in the old foundation school during his time, and the few that were there were so preternaturally stupid that their presence and companionship only served to give Fitzurse still further assurance of his own intellectual greatness. He was something of a musician, something of a draughtsman. He had a certain taste for literature, he had an aptitude for learning modern languages, he was a good fencer, and the result of all this was that he found himself at twenty-three years of age absolutely without any pursuit or occupation, and with his scanty resources running rapidly out. Then he made up his mind that he had better go to the bar, and in order to get to the bar he would have to make his way into literature; and in order to make his way into literature, he proposed to pass through the iron gate of journalism. For this purpose he was taking lessons in shorthand from Christian Pilgrim. The ladder of success was all to be climbed as yet. He had not even put his foot upon the lowest round of it. Vivian Grey had done wonderful things at a much earlier age. That Walter sorrowfully admitted. But he reminded himself at the same time of the immense advantages over him which Vivian Grey had to start with. Even the neediest of Balzac's youths had advantages over him.

However, he was going on now; and the success would come. He would master shorthand; he would get an engagement on some London paper; he would write some brilliant thing which would attract attention to his literary genius; he would get literary employment; he would make money. Then would come the time to make his final choice for letters and politics combined; or law and politics combined. But the time to make the choice had not exactly come as yet, and he went on learning the shorthand. He had taken the idea of the shorthand from Vinnie Lammas, who was in hopes of being able by its acquirement to get an engagement as secretary or amanuensis to some great lady. He had known Vinnie and her mother several years, and he had for more than two years been Vinnie's recognized lover. They were to be married when he saw himself in a fair way to make a living. Meanwhile the girl and her mother were quite willing to wait. They both believed in him to the full. At first, indeed, Vinnie used to be rather amused by his airs and his ambitious flights; but he was very clever, and in her eyes he seemed an astonishing genius, and he was good-looking, and had a graceful figure and ways that would impress and impose upon a girl. So she ended by believing that there was no one in all the world like him. He began by being very fond of her; although he had plunged into the love-making partly because it seemed to him that the heroic and romantic part he was playing required to have a love-adventure thrown in. Then he found something intensely gratifying to his self-love in the admiration, the devotion, the dependence of this pretty girl. When she sometimes

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dwelt on her lowly birth and poor intellectual qualifications it seemed to him that he was indeed a generous creature, and out of very admiration for himself he came to feel a new admiration for her.

Walter had one enjoyment which he did not share with her, of which he never told her anything. It was a very harmless enjoyment, and yet he would not for anything have allowed her to know of it. Many a night when he was quite a boy he used to strain his eyes from the river's bank to see the lights of London fusing themselves into a deep mass of glowing colour in the distance. There among those lights was to be his future field of struggle and of success. Lately, however, he had made it his habit of nights in the season to go to London, to haunt the West End, to wander up and down Piccadilly, and St. James's Street, and Park Lane, and other thoroughfares in the same enchanting region. He was happy for the time in pacing these streets and picturing in his mind the career that he felt sure was before him when he should be a celebrity—a man of fashion and a regular inhabitant of the West End. Sometimes he even mounted the steps of some great club and stood there for a few moments and calmly surveyed the street and the crowd beneath, and tried to make himself believe that he was a member of the institution. He was a sort of poet, perhaps, although he did not write verses; a poet of keen but limited aspiring, a poet whose most soaring imagination took him into and not out of the world of prose. The heaven of heavens into which he presumed, an earthly guest, was the West End of London; the imperial air he desired to draw was the atmosphere of a fashionable drawing-room. He fed and pampered his yearnings until they became the highest motive and the supreme law of life for him.

Often did he spend long hours of the day in the old church by the river. He did not care for the beauty of the scene; he only went to gaze upon the monumental bust of the great man who lay buried there, and of whose illustrious family he had now finally elected himself a member. Vinnie Lammas knew of this favourite occupation of his, and thought it very high-souled and heroic. It grew to be a habit of hers to look for him in the church or the churchyard every evening. His love and his hopes made her very happy. Until she loved him and came to believe that he loved her, she had led a stinted, frozen sort of life. His love warmed the atmosphere and expanded the horizon of her existence. At one time she used to be discontented and complaining, and used to speak with scorn and bitterness, now and then, of the pinched and mean kind of struggle which she and her mother had to make. Since she and Walter had come into companionship her voice had no note of discontent in it. Her happiness made the poor little home all sunny. Her lover sometimes came to have tea at Mrs. Lammas's—not the five-o'clock tea of modern civilization; Mrs. Lammas did not admit such innovations—the good old-fashioned meal of tea and bread and butter which comes long after the early

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dinner. Then Walter sang to them and played to them; and when he was going away Vinnie stood on the doorstep with him for ever so long, and her mother did not object or rebuke. These were happy hours, and while they were hers Vinnie was not merely happy—she knew that she was happy.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE LIES BLEEDING.

THE little dinner-party at Mr. Lisle's went off very pleasantly for most of those who took part in it. It was early, very early; for the company had all to go off to Fitzurse House for the concert, and late hours were not kept in Fitzurseham—at least by the respectable inhabitants, by those who took any account of hours at all. The party was small; Mrs. Pollen, Romont, and Walter Fitzurse being the only guests. Mr. Lisle took in Mrs. Pollen; Romont had Lady Letitia; Fitzurse was proud and delighted to be asked to offer his arm to Janette; and Georgie Lisle had the happiness of Camiola's company. Lady Letitia asked Romont a great many questions about his mother, her old schoolfellow, in whom she felt a reviving interest. They had not met for ever so many years, and probably would never have met again in their ordinary course of existence. They did, however, really like each other; but people in English society are apt to drift away thus into different channels and not to be wafted or driven together any more. Mrs. Romont lived a good deal in the country and with her elder son, and only came to London now and then.

"Your mother must be very uneasy about you when you start off on one of these dreadful enterprises in emigrant ships and places," Lady Letitia said.

"She's got used to it, I think. She has seen me come back all right so often that now she expects me to turn up in the usual way. You see, Lady Letitia, you let your boy go away to the war in Egypt; lots of fond English mothers do just the same, and you don't mind it much——"

"Oh, don't we?" Lady Letitia interposed, with a shudder.

"Still you do it; because it is the custom, and because you think it is right—and I don't see what a country would be worth if it hadn't mothers like that. Well, my mother begins to look on my goings-on in the same light; and I suppose she has a firm belief that 'There's a sweet little cherub who sits up aloft, to keep watch for the life of poor Jack.'"

"It all seems so strange," Lady Letitia said. "We were schoolgirls the other day, and now here am I talking to Kitty's son, and about my own son. Please don't get married for a long time; it would be too awful to think of Kitty's grandson."

"Not much chance of my getting married—besides, where should I find a wife as indulgent to all my ways as my mother is?"

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"You would have to give up all your fads—I beg pardon, I mean all your philanthropic enterprises—then. A wife wouldn't stand your coming home to her every now and then after spending a week in a fever den."

"No," Romont answered gravely; "I could hardly expect that, could I? Then, besides, a wife would always keep me waiting, wouldn't she? And I could not light a cigar and walk home from the theatre or the opera. I should have to go home with her in the growler, or the omnibus, according to the state of our finances; and she would be out of temper a good deal."

"I don't see why she should be out of temper," Lady Letitia remonstrated.

"I don't see it either," Romont answered; "but she would be all the same. Don't you think so, Miss Sabine?" he asked defiantly, for he saw that Camiola, who sat just opposite to him, had suddenly ceased from her talk with Georgie Lisle and was looking fixedly at him.

"I am sure *I* should be if I were she," Camiola answered defiantly also. "I should never be able to keep my temper with any one who started with a preconceived idea that all women lose their temper."

"You would show him he was wrong by showing him he was right?" Romont asked, with a smile.

"I would give him 'reason to cry,' as the nurses say to the children sometimes."

"What would you do if you lost your temper, Miss Sabine?" Mrs. Pollen asked. "How would you show it?"

"Throw things, I suppose," Camiola answered placidly.

"I thought as much," said Mrs. Pollen. "There is a girl who positively knows nothing about it, and evidently never lost her temper in her life. I *do* know how a woman vexes a man when she loses her temper; and I know it isn't by throwing things."

There was a moment's pause, after which Janette was distinctly heard to say, in a voice of intense earnestness—

"You *do* believe with me, Mr. Fitzurse, in the coming of a great day of equality for human beings on this earth?"

Walter Fitzurse found his head swimming for sheer happiness at this dinner-table. It was his first dinner-party, the first time he had ever worn a dress-suit in private life. He had felt nervous in the beginning, but was quite surprised now to find how well he was getting on, and how much he was at his ease. As the eyes of the servant are fixed on the hands of the mistress, so were Walter's eyes fixed for a while on the small thin hands of Janette Lisle, in order that he might be guided by her example in all his movements of fork and spoon and napkin. He began by following her example in the matter of food, declining the courses she declined and the wines she would not have. But he soon found that this example would never suit his healthy appetite, for she hardly ate or drank at all. Therefore he took his cue from Romont, who ate and drank everything and talked all the time.

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"What a delight there is in being in society—really in society!" Walter said to his gratified heart. He had already created himself an aristocrat; now, to please Janette Lisle, he was creating himself a Republican. What of that? Are not aristocrats often the most advanced Republicans? Was there not Philippe Égalité? Were there not Byron and Mirabeau, and ever so many others?

"And do you not agree with me," Janette said, "in hating the miserable distinctions of class, and the frivolous ways of the thing we call good society?"

Walter promptly assured her and himself that if there was one object of his scorn for which he felt more contempt than any other it was the frivolous thing which we call good society.

"One seldom exchanges a true word there—a word from the heart and the soul," Janette said, warming with her own earnest eloquence, and happy in the conviction that she had found in him a kindred spirit.

Walter entirely agreed with her; but he did not explain that until that night society had never afforded him an opportunity of exchanging a word, true or otherwise, with anybody belonging to it. Already, therefore, he was reaching a third stage of his career. He was becoming weary of society, and he was as yet only half through his first dinner-party.

Georgie Lisle was not very happy. He was trying to absorb Camiola, and he feared he was not successful. She made several efforts to get into the general conversation and to draw him into it as well. He would not be drawn in, and she could not leave him out; and therefore she had always to return to her talk with him. He was afraid he was boring her, and that she sometimes hardly listened to what he was saying, and yet he could not give up his attempt to keep her all to himself. He was disappointed; he thought he ought to have been more of a hero in Camiola's eyes. Sometimes he longed to be back again in Egypt. He often wished the Arab spear had finished him off altogether. Would she have really cared for him then, and regretted him, and shed tears over his early grave? The poor youth was almost inclined to shed tears over himself.

Mrs. Pollen observed all that was passing, and she read poor Georgie's little story as clearly as if it had been put into print. She pitied him. She had a great tenderness for young men; but she did not think him much of a hero, and the idea of his being the lover of the superb Camiola seemed to her utterly absurd.

"The more he bores the girl," she thought, "the better for him and for her; it will bring the matter more quickly and more surely to an end."

She resolved that, so far as she could influence things, Georgie Lisle should have the fullest opportunity of boring Miss Sabine during the whole of that evening's entertainment. She was much interested in Walter Fitzurse and Janette. She knew as well that that was Walter's first experience in society as if he had told her.

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She followed and understood every furtive glance of his at the movements of his neighbours. But she rather liked his flexibility, his adroitness, his courage, and his faith in himself.

"How if he were to turn out to be the long-lost relative?" she thought. "I should be glad. I think he is a young man who would go far if he got a good start. If he wants it he shall have it. I'll give him a chance."

She took her imperious way with him; she knew it would be the right way in this case. As the ladies were leaving the dining-room she spoke a passing word or two to him.

"I have not had a chance of saying anything to you, Mr. Fitzurse. Come and talk to me in the drawing-room."

This was spoken in her very best tragedy-queen style, and it greatly impressed Fitzurse.

There was only a formal sitting of the gentlemen after dinner—a cigarette half smoked; nothing more. Walter went up to the drawing-room feeling a little anxious. Mrs. Pollen at once signalled to him to come near her. He went and sat by her. He was somewhat in awe of her dark eyes, her dark draperies, her diamonds, and her white shoulders. She was still a handsome woman with a commanding air, when it suited her humour to put it on. She looked much more like his original idea of an aristocrat than the aristocrats themselves. He did not speak; he waited to be spoken to. He had read or heard somehow that that was the proper way to behave with queens and princesses, and this was at least a social princess.

"Mr. Fitzurse," she said in a voice that went through him, but which no one else heard, "I should like to talk to you, but not here. I am interested in you. Come and see me to-morrow, in Dover Street, Piccadilly. That will do now; go and talk to Miss Lisle."

So she dismissed him, and he went to Miss Lisle, hardly knowing what he was saying or doing. The very words, "Go and talk to Miss Lisle," were such a recognition of the reality of his position, such an indication of a sort of acknowledged bond of companionship between him and Miss Lisle, that he felt as if he were becoming almost too great and too happy all in a moment. There was not much time to talk to Miss Lisle then, however, for the whole company was speedily whirled off to Fitzurse House, to take part in or look on at the evening's performances. But Walter found more than one opportunity during the performances of saying a word to Miss Lisle. Janette was most innocent in her earnestness, and her eyes paid him the compliment of sparkling with pleasure whenever he came near her. He could not but see this, and it made him intoxicated with utter happiness.

Fitzurse House had seen many a brilliant company in its great days, but it had never seen a company so curiously assorted as that which gathered beneath its ancient roof-trees this night. There was rank in the person of Lady Letitia, there was wealth in Mrs.

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Pollen's splendid dress and rivers of diamonds, there was Camiola, the girl with the fortune, and there were Vinnie Lammas and Vinnie Lammas's mother, and Christian Pilgrim. There were the smallest of small shopkeepers and their wives and daughters, and the young men who were paying attention to the daughters, and there were a great many working men and greengrocers, and their decent and subdued womankind, who enjoyed everything, but hardly ventured to speak their joy aloud. Lady Letitia and Mrs. Pollen jointly received the company. Lady Letitia had insisted on this, and when Mrs. Pollen was for leaving all the honour to Lady Letitia, an appeal was made to the decision of Romont.

"Oh, you had better help Lady Letitia," he said. "It's partly 'your shout,' you know, as they say in Australia."

"Partly my shout?" Mrs. Pollen asked; "as they say in Australia? And what might that mean? I have never been in Australia."

"Well, your shout; that means your treat."

"Very good. Very expressive. Then Lady Letitia and I will shout together." So it was settled.

Romont constituted himself, or was constituted by the natural fitness of things, master of the revels. His principal head assistant was Christian Pilgrim. Christian did everything slowly, methodically, and with pale face of unabated gloom. Romont was always quick and energetic in his movements, and seemed to go on as if everything he did brought vigour and enjoyment with it. One luckless man managed to come very drunk to the place; he was a carpenter from one of the lowest parts of Fitzurseham; and he seemed likely to make a disturbance. Christian endeavoured to get him to keep quiet or to go away, but could not prevail over him in the slightest, and came to Romont in despair and dismay. Romont sought out the delinquent.

"Look here, old pal," he said, in a rough, good-humoured way, "this will never do, you know. You have been having too much beer, haven't you? Come along with me; a quiet smoke in the open air will do you no end of good. You are not half a bad sort, I know. Come along."

With good humour and a little gentle pressure he got the inebriate out into the grounds in a moment, and there gave him into the charge of a decent but withal sympathetic working man, lenient to mortal weaknesses, who undertook to get the bemused comrade safely home.

This was the only hint of disturbance or interruption to the evening's performances. The performances consisted of vocal and instrumental music, with interjected recitations and some "living pictures" of a very simple and intelligible order. Walter Fitzurse took part in various concerted pieces; so did Lady Letitia and both her daughters. Camiola did not play or sing well enough, she insisted, to do either in public. Vinnie Lammas was one of the chorus in a piece wherein also Walter took part. She was

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looking very pretty and pleased; thus far everything had been pleasant to her. She was delighted even to see Walter talking with apparent familiarity to Miss Lisle. Walter had not much opportunity, up to this time, of saying many words to Vinnie. But Vinnie was content to wait. He would come and talk to her by-and-by, and in the meantime she was satisfied with the belief that his heart was with her always. She was dressed very neatly, but to Walter's eyes shabbily; and she had on some cheap little ornaments which did not seem by any means becoming, he thought. Mrs. Pollen observed Vinnie, was attracted to her in the first instance by her prettiness, and then by the fact that every other moment Vinnie's eyes turned to where Walter happened to be standing or sitting. It did not escape her observation that Walter by no means reciprocated this attention, but, on the contrary, seemed to avoid looking in Vinnie's direction. Romont talked to everybody, talked a good deal to Vinnie, whom he remembered to have seen before, and talked to her mother, which much delighted them both.

Camiola found herself watching Romont and his movements with an interest which sometimes almost alarmed her. More than once she hurriedly turned her eyes away, as if she had no right to look at him, and then found herself seeking him with her eyes again. She saw how he contrived to get quietly rid of the poor drunken fellow; she saw how kindly his manner was even to this unprepossessing creature, whom Camiola would have shuddered at if he were near her. She saw how he talked to Vinnie Lammas and to Vinnie's mother; how he had a sweet friendly word for every one; how absolutely free of any hint of patronage his manner was to the very humblest; how many eyes of young and old brightened when he spoke to their owners; how the old women and the children liked him. For some reason which she could not explain she felt once as if tears were coming into her eyes. She thought if she could be a man she should wish to be such a man as that.

Once he was passing near her, and she could not keep from saying a word to him.

"Oh, Mr. Romont, I am so sorry. I am afraid I was very rude to you." Then she felt herself growing red.

"Rude to me, Miss Sabine? No; not a bit of it. I don't think you could be rude if you tried."

"Yes; I didn't try; but I *was* rude. To-day at dinner, about women losing their temper, don't you remember? and the other day when you called out my name. I was rude. I am very sorry. I think it was horrid of me. Won't you forgive me?"

Romont looked into the girl's eyes—her frank, friendly, yet now somewhat shrinking eyes, and he answered her with perfect gravity. "It is very kind and sweet of you to look at things in that way. I don't think you were rude; I am sure you were not. But I know you were a little annoyed at my stupid blunder, and

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I don't think I went the right way about making up for it. I feel ever so much obliged to you for speaking so nicely about it now."

"And you do forgive me?"

"Oh yes; I do forgive you, if there was anything to forgive, and if you say there was; but it must be an exchange of forgiveness. You forgive me, don't you?" He added, in his own mind, and to himself, "And I'll never call you Camiola any more, I suppose; any more."

One might have almost fancied she knew what he was saying to himself, for she flushed slightly, and said in an embarrassed sort of way, "Oh yes; of course. And we are friends again?"

"We are friends," he said. "I don't say again. I am sure we were never enemies."

Then Georgie Lisle came up and "froze on" to Camiola, and Romont went on and talked to some one else.

Meanwhile the party was not "going" somehow. Mr. Lisle did his best to get into conversation with people, but could not make much of it. The company generally did not get on with each other. There was no fusion, no mingling or blending.

"Can't we manage to stir these people up a little more?" Mrs. Pollen asked of Romont. "This entertainment is like the materials for a plum-pudding thrown together into a bag without skill to blend or heat to boil them."

"This sort of thing is always a failure," Romont said. "It must be so; it couldn't be anything else in a place like this. It is meant to bring people of different classes together, and they won't come together. It is an attempt to make people think they are on an equality for the hour, and they know they are not on an equality, and what's the good? The poor find themselves poorer than ever when they see you smart women with your lace and your diamonds."

"I am sure I would have left my laces and my diamonds at home if that would have made things any better."

"But it wouldn't. They would know that you had them all the same. Half the girls here are ashamed of their poverty now, and are hiding themselves away behind doors and in corners, and I am certain they would have thought themselves and their dresses perfection if they were at some little tea-party of their own. I have been talking to a nice little girl over yonder, and all the time she kept glancing now at Miss Sabine's dress and now at her own, and I could see that she was ashamed of her own poor little fineries, although I dare say she and her mother thought she was dressed fit for a palace when she was setting out this evening. Equality? Stuff! Do you think anything on earth would make that girl believe that she is on an equal footing socially with Miss Sabine? Ten to one if the girl has a sweetheart here he thinks less of her now than he did this afternoon. There will be some love-affairs spoiled here this evening, you may be sure; that will be one of the results of your patronage."

"Don't say my patronage. I never patronized anybody, unless

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some one who was trying to patronize me. You are an odd sort of young man, but there is some sense in what you are saying. I like the whole affair, however; it is as good as a play to me. It is a play, and I am only a looker-on. All life is a play to me now, and nothing more. I am not a philanthropist."

"You are a deceitful woman," said Romont. "You are a fraud; that is what *you* are. You took me in at first, but now I have found you out; I have unmasked you, as the people say in the plays."

"What is the young man talking about now?" Mrs. Pollen exclaimed.

"Yes; it is quite true. You told me yourself that you were egotistic and selfish, and I don't know what else, and that you cared nothing about your fellow man or woman. Don't I know now that you pass all your days and half your nights, I dare say, plotting and scheming and planning how to do somebody a good turn? Don't talk to me; I know you! So does my pal, Christian Pilgrim; *he* has found you out! That's not all—he has become your accomplice; he told me so."

"Well, well," Mrs. Pollen said, not ungratified by his words, "time will unfold me and we shall see. Meanwhile it looks a lovely night, and the moon is up. Will you take me for one turn in the grounds or the gardens, or whatever they are called?"

They passed out of the crowd and into the quiet of the outer air. Camiola and Georgie Lisle were already in the garden; had been wandering about there for some minutes. Camiola was not listening with deep attention to her companion's words. Her mind was a little distraught to-night. Almost for the first time in her life she was beginning to feel unhappy.

Suddenly Georgie came to a stand, and said, "Do you think I am a coward, Camiola?"

She turned on him a look half amused, half surprised; not in the least serious.

"Yes; do you think I am a coward?" He looked painfully in earnest.

"Why, you silly boy, who ever thought of such a thing? Of course I don't; but, do you know, I don't fancy any man is really a coward in that way. I think they'll all fight if you get them into uniform and put them under leaders. I don't think much of that sort of courage. I dare say women would do just the same if it were the fashion."

"You don't think me less brave than other men?"

"My dear Georgie, I am perfectly convinced that there is no danger in this world that could put you out for a moment. But what are you talking about?"

"I am talking about *this*. The moment that spear tumbled me over I felt a thrill of delight go through me. Just before I fainted my last feeling was delight, and the first moment I came to my senses again my feeling was delight. Do you know why?"

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"Well, I must say I don't. One may be content to get a wound for one's flag, but I don't quite understand positive delight in getting it. No; I give it up, Georgie."

"You do? You can't even guess?" He looked disappointed. "Can't you understand that I was glad because I thought, if I did not die, I should probably be sent home?"

She did look surprised indeed now. "Sent home? Because you were to be sent home? But were you really so home-sick as all that? To want to get home—and a campaign going on; and one's comrades in the thick of it! My dear Georgie, I don't believe a word of it."

"That is why I asked if you thought me a coward," he said gravely. "What I am saying is true; I was longing to get home."

"Well, it wasn't out of cowardice, that's certain. There are not any cowards like that; and even if there were *you* couldn't be one. It was something else. Do tell me. Though I wish you hadn't begun to tell me anything, for I don't like mysteries. And I always guess wrong when I have to guess at all."

"I was longing to get back to England, Camiola, because I was longing to get back to *you*; because I love you."

He took her hand in his. She was too much astonished to withdraw it at once. He looked into her wondering eyes; the moon shone upon his thin, delicate, boyish face, and on the wasted cheeks, which now even in the pale moonlight showed themselves suffused with a girl-like flush of conflicting emotions.

Camiola did not at first realize the full meaning of what was passing, and of which she was a part. She was for a moment almost inclined to laugh. But she began to understand the story told by those eager eyes and that delicate flushed face and the trembling of the hot hand that held her own. Then she felt as if she could not keep from bursting into tears. It was all so utterly unexpected. It was all so bewildering, so distracting, so terrible.

"Oh, Georgie, my dear Georgie," she murmured, drawing away her hand, "I never thought of this."

"I know you never did; I never tried to make you think of it before. I didn't know it myself until I found myself away from you—out in Egypt. Then it came on me. But when I got back I held my tongue, Camiola: and do you know why? Let me take your hand again—you won't? You are angry with me?"

"No, no," she said in a low, sad voice. "Why should I be angry? But this is a great misfortune, Georgie, for you and for me."

"Why should it be a misfortune?" He spoke now in more assured and eager tones, no longer tremulous, all having been told. "Why should it be a misfortune? All my people love you, my mother adores you. You don't love me as I love you, I know that. But you do like me, I know *that*; and the right sort of love will come in time. You don't dislike me?" for something in the look of her face made him stop with this sudden question.

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"Dislike you, Georgie, my dear friend, my brother and more than brother? Why, what a question! I am very fond of you, you know that very well."

"Then why should this be a misfortune? I shall be quite satisfied with the kind of love you can give me for the present. I can wait until the other love comes; I can be happy with you even if it never comes."

"I wish you had told me all this before," she said, with something like impatience in her voice. "What is the good of making mysteries about things?"

"I would have told you at once, only I was afraid if I asked you to marry me people might think it was because of your fortune."

"My fortune! There again; my fortune! I wish my fortune was at the bottom of the sea, or—or—yes, that the devil had it!" Camiola exclaimed, losing all sense of the seemliness of words in her excitement. "There, I oughtn't to have said that, and I wish I hadn't said it; but I feel it all the same, and you drive me to it, Georgie! What did it matter what people said? Who would have believed it? Do you think I should have believed it? Do you think your mother would have believed it, or Janette, or dear, kind, generous Mr. Lisle? I think you had no right to keep this thing to yourself all this long time. If you were really in love with me, why didn't you say so, and not let things go on in this absurd sort of way?"

One might have thought, from her words and her tones, that she was enraged at having somehow lost the chance of marrying him. But Georgie Lisle did not now interpret her meaning thus.

"Surely, Camiola," he pleaded, in a voice not much like that of a hopeful lover, "it cannot be too late? Nothing has happened to make any change."

"You don't know; how could you? It *is* too late; it is ever so much too late."

"But, Camiola—Camiola; my love——"

"Oh, don't talk in that way; you must not. It *is* too late. If you had told me this sooner; if you had written to me from Egypt."

"Would you have married me?" he asked, in very doubtful tones.

"I would: yes, I would. I was always very fond of you—as fond as if you were my brother; and I would have married you to please you, and to please Lady Letitia, and to please Janette, if it would have pleased them. Do you think I could have refused you if you wished it, and Lady Letitia? Do you think I could have sent you away disappointed, and offended her? Oh no."

"Then why must you refuse me now?"

"Can't you guess?" She turned her eyes away from his. She looked sadly along the path of light which the moon made on the quiet river.

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"You love some one else?"

"Yes, Georgie."

"Some one you didn't know when I went away?"

"Yes, Georgie."

"Oh, but it can't be; there is nobody." He never thought of Albert Romont. He had been jealous of Romont's popularity with the whole family, Camiola included, but it had not occurred to his harmless egotism to suspect anything else.

"Camiola, you are not serious; you are only making an excuse. There is something else."

"There is nothing else, Georgie, nothing in the world; and what I say is true—only too true. I wish it were not; I wish from my heart that I were free to marry you, if it were only to please Lady Letitia. But you spoke too late, my dear boy; you spoke too late." She turned her face to him now with a tender and a pitying expression, and he saw that tears of genuine emotion were sparkling in her eyes.

"Have I been long too late?" He looked away; he did not wish to embarrass her by letting her know that he had seen her tears. But she would not have heeded.

"About forty-eight hours," she said, with a strange smile, and she shook her head as if in vain protest over the unfair dealings of the destinies. "About forty-eight hours, Georgie, more or less. I think if, when you were telegraphing your arrival at Southampton, you had telegraphed an offer of marriage to me, I should have met you when you came with a yes and a kiss."

"But this is impossible; this is absurd, Camiola. You can't have fallen so much in love in that short time."

"Can't I, Georgie? Oh, but I can, though; and, what is more and worse, my dear boy, I *have*." She was making a desperate effort to keep up her courage and be lively.

"But there is nobody!" he exclaimed angrily. "Who is it, Camiola?" he demanded, rather inconsistently with the spirit of his positive assertion.

"That, Georgie, is a question you mustn't ask; at all events, I don't mean to answer it. I haven't been unkind to you, dear Georgie; dear brother, you will not be unkind to your sister?"

"Still, if we are brother and sister, I ought to know," he urged despairingly.

"No, my dear, you ought not to know; it is a woman's secret altogether; it is my secret. I wouldn't tell even Lady Letitia a word about it; and you won't let her know anything, Georgie—I know you won't, for my sake? I am going to be a very unhappy girl, I know, and I am making you unhappy; but it isn't my fault; and oh, please forgive me, and don't let Lady Letitia know."

"Does—does—*he* know?" Georgie got out the word with a great effort and after more than one spasm.

She drew away at first as if the question were hurtful to her; but her manner instantly changed into its familiar kindliness and

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frankness. "He does not know," she said; "and he never shall know, so far as I can help it. It would be impossible that he could have the faintest idea; and I am ashamed of myself—and there, don't ask me any more, or encourage me into telling you any more. I don't believe any other girl in the world would have told even her brother as much as I have told you to-night, if she were in my place. Now, Georgie, let us go in; and let us not say any more about this wretched business, ever again. You don't want me to marry you now, Georgie, any more, do you?" She looked to him with a wan smile on her sad face.

"No!" the young man exclaimed, with a burst of hysterical passion; "I don't—oh yes, I do—I do!"

Then he sent forth a cry like that of a woman, and he threw his arms wildly up and staggered and fell crash on the gravel walk. In his excitement he had caused his wound to reopen, and the blood was crimsoning the front of his shirt. Camiola did not call out or utter a word. She got down on her knees beside him, and was setting herself to get the neck of his shirt open and to give him air. She thought he had merely fainted, and she had always heard that one must not try to raise a person who has fainted, but keep the fallen one in a recumbent position, and secure freedom of breathing and plenty of air. But she soon found her hands covered with some horrible dew, and she could see in the clear moonlight that it was blood. She knew what had happened, she knew his wound had broken out into bleeding again; but she did not know what might happen—she did not know that he might not die in her arms. Yet she would not cry out; and even in that moment of dread and agony her first thought was for his mother, for dear Lady Letitia, for the wild alarm it might bring upon her. "Oh, if only somebody, anybody, would come! Did no one, no one but he and she, think of coming into the open air on such a night as that? Was no one coming her way? If he were to die!" At the thought she bent over him and kissed his pale lips again and again, and called him by fond names, such as a sister lavishes on a parting brother. And while she was kissing him she heard footsteps on the gravel walk, and she saw a man and a woman near.

"Oh, come here!" she called, in a low, clear voice, meant only to be heard by those who were near, and not to alarm a whole crowded company.

Mrs. Pollen and Mr. Romont approached. Romont, without staying to ask a question, or indeed to speak a word, got down on his knees beside Camiola.

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CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING UP.

CAMIOLA had not noticed at first who it was that came to her assistance. She recognized Mrs. Pollen before she looked at Romont. When she did see him she started and exclaimed, "Mr. Romont!" in a tone of surprise and something like alarm. This was not lost on Mrs. Pollen. Romont and she had come suddenly on Camiola and Georgie; had turned round the corner of a path of cedars, and had found their way stopped by Camiola and her fallen lover. They had both seen Camiola kiss poor Georgie's pallid face. Neither stopped to think anything about that at the moment; the pair might have been husband and wife, or brother and sister; but when Romont, dropping on his knees, saw that he was beside Camiola Sabine, and that she had been kissing young Lisle, the wounded hero come back from the wars, he naturally drew the only conclusion that seemed at the time fairly open to rational man's acceptance. Such conclusion, too, Mrs. Pollen might have drawn if she had not seen and appreciated the look of pain and shame which came over Camiola's face, like a wet wan cloud over the moon, when she saw that Romont was near her. "If I know anything of women, I know what that means," Mrs. Pollen said to herself. "There will be some pretty playing at cross purposes going on here presently, if some one doesn't intervene in time." It did not take her long to make up her mind any more than to come to her conclusions, and she made up her mind that if no one else intervened in time she would.

"We were walking here, and he fainted," Camiola stammered; "and he had been wounded, you know——"

"Yes, I see," Romont quietly answered; "his wound has taken to bleeding again. He mayn't be any the worse for that, perhaps. We may lift him now, I think. He is recovering himself; the faint is nearly over. Mrs. Pollen, suppose you kindly come and take his head in your lap?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Pollen answered, with promptness and perfect composure. She sat quietly down on the gravel walk, and raised the boy's head tenderly and took it in her lap. "Why, it's Georgie Lisle," she whispered. Camiola now was standing up. Romont was still bending over the wounded youth, and was holding a handkerchief tightly squeezed against that part of the lad's shoulder from which the blood was oozing; the rush of blood had ceased.

Georgie opened his eyes languidly; closed them again; opened them anew less languidly, and murmured, "Camiola?"

"Here, Georgie, near you," Camiola said. "You are better, are you not? Your wound began to bleed a little——"

"I'm all right," he murmured. "It's nothing. I don't care about the wound; it isn't *that*."

"No," thought Mrs. Pollen, "it isn't *that*."

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He became aware of the fact that Camiola and he were not any longer alone, and he made an attempt to rise, but Mrs. Pollen kept him down with gentle force. "Where on earth am I?" he asked, with a curiosity just arousing itself from that languor after a faint which takes everything for granted, and is puzzled by nothing.

"You are lying in the lap of a woman old enough to be your mother," Mrs. Pollen informed him; "and two minutes' walk from a room where you will be able to go in a very few seconds. Mr. Romont says there is no harm done, and he understands things; and I think he is right, and I have seen a few wounded men myself in my time."

"Give me your hand, old man," Romont said, as he saw Georgie trying to rise. "All right, Miss Sabine"—Camiola was making an instinctive movement to come to the rescue also—"I'll take care of him. We'll get him quietly into a bed, and then I'll have a surgeon come and see him at once. There's sure to be a surgeon of some kind in all that crowd yonder. Nobody ever saw a crowd like that without a doctor of some sort in it."

"I can walk all right," Georgie said, staggering as he said the words; "I'm sure I can."

"Still, you may as well lean on my arm," Romont said.

"And on mine," added Mrs. Pollen; and she offered him an arm which was as strong as it was white and shapely. Camiola felt as if she were left out in the cold. She was now beginning to wonder what they could have thought of her. They must have seen her kiss poor Georgie. What did that matter? Was he not almost her brother? Was he not to all appearance dying at the time? Still, they were, perhaps, not exactly in possession of all the facts of the case; they certainly were not in possession of some of the facts; and what would they think of her? what would *he* think of her?

"I'm awfully jolly now." Georgie tried to speak in cheery man-of-the-world tone. "I say, how awfully kind you both are!"

"It's in Mr. Romont's line," Mrs. Pollen said. "His business in life is to go about helping people—it's his trade; and for me, I'm always delighted to have a chance of doing anything for a good-looking young man."

"Look here," Romont suggested, "can't we sneak into the house in some quiet way, down the chimney or somehow, so that we mayn't be seen, and this boy's mother get frightened? You know your way about, Mrs. Pollen; it's your own homestead."

"Yes; but my foot isn't on my native heath, and I have only just got hold of the place; and—— Oh, here's Mr. Pilgrim; he knows all about it."

Mr. Pilgrim had come mooning out of the house, at odds with all the festivity and tired of the crowd. He was put in possession of the facts, and he undertook to conduct George utterly unseen into a remote and quiet room, where he could lie on a bed until a surgeon came, and he promised to find a surgeon in a moment.

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"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Camiola, with sparkling eyes—"thank you so much, dear, dear Mr. Pilgrim! What a treasure you are! you always are."

Pilgrim's bloodless cheek did not indeed redden, but a positive spasm came over his face, and his lips trembled. "The very thing I might have expected!" Mrs. Pollen said to her own soul; "just as I thought first. We must really get this young lady to moderate the transports of her gratitude."

Georgie was conveyed away by Romont and Pilgrim. Mrs. Pollen and Camiola remained standing on the steps of one of the side doors of the house. They were in shadow; there were but few lights in the windows on that side. The sounds of the music and the various movements came on Camiola's ear clearly enough to bring sense of companionship and shelter and protection with them, but not loudly enough to suggest interruption. She felt that she must say something to Mrs. Pollen; it would be impossible not to offer some explanation, to let matters stand just as they did. Camiola did not as yet much like Mrs. Pollen; thought her fibre rather coarse; did not understand her; had not even tried to understand her. Also she had somehow got the idea into her mind that Mrs. Pollen did not much like her. It was not pleasant, therefore, to have to humble herself to explanations and to endeavour to propitiate Mrs. Pollen, but it had to be done.

"I am afraid you will be inclined to form wrong conclusions," she began, "about me, and about Georgie Lisle. You saw me kiss him?"

"Yes, I saw you kiss him," Mrs. Pollen said; "more than once, too. What matter, Miss Sabine? I shan't tell. I think to kiss and tell is not a bit worse than to see a kiss and tell."

"But it isn't that," Camiola answered somewhat hotly; "I don't care about being seen; I don't care if all the people saw me kiss him. I have known him a long time, and I am very fond of him, and he fainted, and I thought he was going to die, and why shouldn't I kiss him?"

"I am sure, my dear young lady, I know no reason why you shouldn't. I dare say I should have kissed him myself out of pure sympathy under the same conditions, although I have not known him a long time, and am not particularly fond of him."

"But it isn't that," Camiola interrupted.

"Oh, it isn't that? Then what is it?"

"Well, perhaps you will think that Georgie Lisle and I are engaged; that we are lovers."

"I don't think anything of the kind," said Mrs. Pollen quietly.

"I am very glad."

"I don't think you are engaged, and I don't believe you are lovers; at least, I don't believe that you are in love with him. If it comes to that, I know you are not." She fixed her eyes on Camiola's face. Camiola felt herself growing tremulous under the bold, deep eyes.

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"My dear Miss Sabine," Mrs. Pollen said, "I don't want to know any of your secrets—at least, I didn't; but I can't help knowing your one particular secret now, and I do know it, and you know now that I know it."

"Oh, for pity's sake; oh, for Heaven's sake!" Camiola implored, and she put her hands instinctively over her eyes. For Mrs. Pollen was right; Camiola felt too truly that Mrs. Pollen knew already that secret which twenty-four hours ago, two hours ago, she did not quite know herself. Georgie's own love-tale had set her heart in strange commotion. The sudden pang of shame which made her cry out Romont's name when she saw him kneeling beside her, and knew that he had seen her kiss Georgie Lisle, had first made her certain that she was in love, and with Romont.

"It don't matter my knowing it," Mrs. Pollen said. "Nobody will be any the wiser of it for me. I wouldn't have breathed a word of this to you, but that I do think it is right, and the part of one who wishes you well, to put you a little on your guard."

"On my guard against what?" Camiola asked, with returning defiance, and meeting Mrs. Pollen's look now boldly enough.

"Against yourself, my dear, and for the sake of others. I know that you are no flirt or commonplace beauty of any kind; I don't believe you are even very vain—for a handsome girl with a fortune, that is to say——"

"Oh, that everlasting fortune!" Camiola murmured between her teeth. "Must I always hear of it?"

"It *is* a nuisance to be rich—at least I often find it so; but I don't know that I ever heard of anybody else who complained of it except you. But I speak out to you for your own good and the good of other people, and I wouldn't speak in such a way if I didn't believe you to be a woman with some heart and some brains. Make up your mind about this young Lisle."

"My mind is made up; I told him so."

"Yes; I thought as much. Well, then, keep to your resolve; you won't find it easy, but keep to it. You will have some trouble, that I see; but you must bear it and keep to your resolve. Don't, for all the friends and relatives in the world, consent to marry that young man, or any man whom you don't love. For the man you do love—why, let things go as they will; he doesn't suspect—as yet—what I know. About other men—do, like a good girl, let them alone. Keep clear of them, whatever their class. They are men, not stocks or stones. You are full of kindness, I know, but a handsome woman's kindness may sometimes kill a man. There, that's enough. Don't be angry with me for talking to you like a mother.—I wish to Heaven I were your mother.—Well, Mr. Pilgrim, is our young patient all right? Thanks; I'm so glad to hear it. —Come, Miss Sabine, we had better go in. Fine as the night is, we have lungs and throats, you know."

She swept Camiola away with her, and they were presently immersed in the madding crowd. Camiola was for a while abso-

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lutely silent. The whole conditions of her life seemed to have been changed in a moment. She was as one suddenly taken into charge by some being from another world, and not as yet quite certain whether it is Goethe's Mephistopheles or Massinger's Angelo; a spirit of darkness or a spirit of light.

As Christian Pilgrim stood in the shadow he was joined by Romont, who had just left Georgie.

"He's all right," Romont said; "he is not going to die this time. He'll be able to walk home presently, and nobody will know that anything happened to him."

"It's a pretty bad wound," Pilgrim said, shaking his head.

"I wish to Heaven I had the wound," Romont said, "and the balsam." He was thinking of the kisses he had seen laid on the lips of prostrate Georgie Lisle. "And I suppose the fellow doesn't even know he got them," he thought in his own mind. "They would have wakened me out of the sleep of death, I verily believe."

"What do you mean, Mr. Romont?" Pilgrim asked timidly; "what balsam?" He understood a meaning in Romont's words but not their meaning, and Romont's expression puzzled him.

"Nothing in particular; at least, never mind, old man. The world has some lucky fellows, Pilgrim."

"I am sure you are one of the very luckiest, Mr. Romont; the happiest, at least. The world is very kind to you, and you are very kind to the world."

"Well, I haven't much to complain of, and that's a fact," said Romont cheerily. "You look rather out of sorts, Pilgrim. But then, you always look out of sorts; it's a way you have. Do you know that I have a kind of idea you were scared by the sight of that poor lad's blood? I am used to that. I have carried the Geneva cross."

"I think you have done everything, Mr. Romont," his admirer said. They were a curious contrast: the one all youth and health and animation, a living illustration of the fusion of fire and clay; the other wasted, prematurely old, depressed, hopeless.

"There's one thing I mean not to do just now, if I can help it, Pilgrim, my Christian hero."

"And that is, Mr. Romont?"

"I mean not to make a fool of myself," Romont answered; and Pilgrim could not get him to say any more on the subject.

The gardens, which had been so lonely when the festivity was at its height, were now crowded, for the party was now breaking up, and the guests were going away. The band was playing "God save the Queen," and this was understood to be the signal of parting. A cloud of men, women, and children was breaking over the garden. The cloud soon melted into living streams along the broad gravel walks under the cedars. There was much talking, but it was subdued in tone. The familiarity which had been just beginning to grow up in the minds of the humble guests during their

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hours within doors suddenly deserted them again, as they came into the open air and the shadow of the stately old trees and the vicinity of the Rector's carriage and his departing family. Georgie Lisle was able to go home with his people, and none of them knew anything of what had happened to him. Walter Fitzurse kept with them to the last. He had handed Janette to the carriage, and on the way thither was trying to summon up courage enough to ask her for a flower from her fading bouquet; but he had not found the courage while the opportunity remained, and he had to abandon the idea.

Mr. Lisle and Georgie were walking home, the distance being but short. Walter was turning away, somewhat depressed in mood, having failed to ask for the flower, when he came face to face with Romont.

"You're not going to bed yet, I dare say. I'm not; that's flat. Come along with me to the club; or stay, we'll go to my rooms; we'll be quieter there. I have got a little brougham here which will rattle us over in no time. It isn't mine, but my mother's, only I make use of it a good deal for her now and then, as indeed I do of most things that are hers and that I can make any use of."

He put his hand on Walter's arm, and was leading him away.

It was clear that Romont did not suppose Walter to be a resident of that quarter, and Walter could not summon up courage enough to tell him the truth. Walter was not at all inclined to say that he would be expected to escort one of the poor little girls of Fitzurseham to her home. Nor, on the other hand, did it seem probable to Walter that his new friend would often be in that region again, and he was determined, come what would, to transfer himself to another and a different quarter at once. So they made their way through a little crowd at the gate. Walter thought he saw a glimpse of Miss Lammas as they went by, and it only made him quicken his steps. There were not many carriages; the lights of the brougham soon flashed upon them, and they got in and rolled away.

"I am glad it's over," said Romont; "and yet—I don't know; I think I enjoyed myself more than I expected."

He was determined to make the best of things.

"So did I," Walter replied, and tried to make his answer seem careless. Truly, he had enjoyed himself more than he expected, and in a different way.

Mrs. Pollen had announced her intention of remaining behind until the company had all gone. She wished to see what the place would look like when deserted, she said; she remained standing by the ancient hearth in the great hall, which had been deadly lively with its ill-assorted company a short time before. In the very last flickering-out group of guests she noticed the odd figure of Jethro Merridew, the morning callman. Mrs. Pollen knew him already, and had heard of his story.

"Mr. Merridew," she said, as he was slowly passing, "I want to

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say a word to you before you go;" and she beckoned him with her fan.

He approached her deferentially and bowing with antique courtesy, renewing his bows as he came nearer and nearer.

"Mr. Merridew, you and I are both waiting and looking for some one. I have come to Fitzurseham to look for a relation whom I may never find; and you are waiting for your daughter. May I ask if she has yet come?"

Merridew at first looked sharply and almost angrily at her when she spoke of his daughter. The subject was one which he was accustomed to hear of only in connection with gibes and rudeness and laughter. The feelings of the Fitzurseham public were not always very refined, and certain misfortunes were usually considered by them as legitimate theme for mirth. Any supposed derangement of a man's faculties, for example, was regarded as a very fitting subject for comic observation and for pleasant raillery. If a man's wife were supposed to be rather free-and-easy in her conduct, it was esteemed quite the right sort of thing to chaff the husband about it; to "rally him," as the humorists of a past day would have said, and to take good care he should not forget it. In the same spirit Mr. Merridew's supposed craze on the one theme of his daughter and her expected grandeur was understood to give all his neighbours a proper occasion for making fun of him. It may be that just for an instant Mr. Merridew supposed Mrs. Pollen was indulging in the popular pastime; but the expression on her face soon satisfied and quieted him.

"No, I have not yet heard from her," the poor little man said. "I came here, ma'am, with the thought that perhaps this was the place and this was the occasion when she might believe it fitting to make her reappearance; but no, no. 'She comes not yet to glad her father's eyes,' as the poet says."

"You have never told me all about her, Mr. Merridew; and I should much like to know. I should also like to tell you about my search for a relation, of whose very existence I am not certain. You have lived some time in this place, and you must know everybody; you might help me in my search, perhaps, and I might help you."

"I don't talk about it much," he said hurriedly—"here, in Fitzurseham, because people don't understand, and are rude and vulgar, and don't believe, and laugh at their betters. The loud laugh, ma'am, speaks the vacant mind."

"I quite understand your caution; and I too am very slow about letting people in general know anything of my object in coming to this place. They wouldn't understand me; they would think me absurd. But you, Mr. Merridew, are not people in general, and I should not mind telling you."

Mr. Merridew was entirely overcome.

"I should be proud to tell my story to a lady like you, a real lady with a heart for sympathy—the lady of the land, indeed,

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if I may presume to apply to you the words of the great poet, Coleridge."

"Shall we talk of it now, Mr. Merridew? I am not fond of going to bed early; I don't know if you are."

"This night, ma'am, it is my intention to outwatch the Bear, as Milton says. I do not propose to sleep at all, for I have to arouse half Fitzurseham at all manner of early hours—after your gracious hospitality of this evening."

"Sit here, then, Mr. Merridew, and tell me all about it." For Mrs. Pollen had been by no means convinced that Merridew's notions came of mere monomania, and she was inclined to regard him with compassion, and was curious to know whether something could not be done for him.

CHAPTER X.

TILL THE DAWN.

FITZURSE felt himself floating in a very heaven of delight as the brougham rattled through the streets of the West End. The town was all alive. As they drove down Piccadilly there were strings of carriages waiting outside houses which had awnings spread over their doorways and carpets stretched beneath them. Little armies of footmen were in rapid manœuvre. Ladies in evening dress and sparkling with diamonds were coming in and going out. The brougham had to drive slowly, to Walter's great delight. But he took care not to show any delight. He leaned back, and put on as well as he could an air of incurious familiarity. But when his mind sometimes returned to the dull and dirty and decaying rows of houses with which he was familiar, to the darkness and squalor and meanness of the life which he had so lately left behind, he felt that the bottom of the Thames would be to him more welcome than a longer residence at Fitzurseham.

The brougham turned into St. James's Street. The windows of all the clubs were blazing with light. Men were walking along in evening dress, some with their light outer coats thrown carelessly over their arms. Fitzurse noticed with a sort of wonder that no one seemed to look after them, or take their appearance in the street in such attire as anything out of the common. If one were to parade the main street at Fitzurseham in evening dress the whole population would be after him. How many dress-coats, he wondered, were there in the whole place?

Two or three doors out of St. James's Street the brougham stopped at a small old-fashioned house. "This is my den," Romont said, and opening the door with a latch-key, he cordially invited Fitzurse to come in. Fitzurse assumed, when he saw the latch-key used, that he would be shown into a house with one little jet of light burning for the illumination of the late comer, all the rest of the inmates being in bed. He found, however, that a respectable

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elderly gentleman in black came out at once to receive them. For a moment he forgot what he had already learned of his new friend's family, and he fancied this was Romont's father, who had sat up probably to censure him for not coming home earlier. He had even a faint idea that he might himself come in for some of the blame. Seeing, however, that the respectable parent only came forward to take the coats of the late comers, Fitzurse found the truth borne in upon him that the elderly personage was his friend's servant. It was then clear that he was launched at once into a world of which he had up to that time only read or dreamed—a world in which young unmarried men kept valets, and thought nothing of it.

To do him justice, he quickly pulled himself together, and was equal to the new and strange conditions in which he found himself. The conditions were not much less strange than those which surrounded the first waking moments of Abou Hassan in the "Arabian Nights," when he finds himself turned into the Commander of the Faithful.

Soda-water, brandy, whisky, cigars, cigarettes, were produced, and Romont told his servant he might go to bed. The two young men began naturally to talk about the evening they had spent and the people they had met. Walter was longing to get into some conversation about Miss Lisle, and yet was shy of approaching the subject too quickly and directly. He spoke first of Camiola, and launched forth in great praise of her beauty. Romont did not seem inclined to say much about her, and answered in a constrained sort of way, until Walter asked him in a tone of something like surprise whether he did not think her handsome.

"Oh yes, I admired her; very much, in fact—one can't help it; but I rather kept out of her way. I am shy of these women with lots of money, new rich people especially. This girl, I am told, has a big fortune, and the Lisles are bringing her out; and I dare say her head is pretty well turned already, and she fancies every man who goes near her wants to marry her. I am not rich enough to put myself in the way of that sort of thing. I haven't anything but what a very dear old mother is good enough to give me, and I must keep clear of girls like Miss Sabine. But she's a very fine girl all the same; and any one who wants a handsome wife with plenty of money would do well to try his luck there. I don't; at least, I shouldn't like to marry a woman who would always think that she had made me rich, and that she ought to run the concern."

"Miss Lisle is a charming girl, I think," Walter said in a tentative way.

"A nice face; yes, and rather a clever sort of girl, I fancy. But she has too many views of life for my taste. I hadn't much talk with her. There were some pretty girls, I thought, among the crowd, if I may put it that way—little milliners, and that sort of thing. I got alongside of a girl I used to see when I was acting my part of Alsatian up yonder. I used to see her going and

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coming, but I never ventured to speak to her. A working man mustn't presume to speak to a milliner—go to! What would the world be coming to? There must be classes, we trust. But I had some talk with her to-night."

"Do you know her name?" Fitzurse asked, with a misgiving and an uncomfortable anticipation.

"Oh yes, I knew her name before. She's a girl named Lammas—Vinnie Lammas—a very nice clever little girl; and, look here, just as modest and well-behaved a girl as you ever saw. I called her a milliner, but I don't think she is that. Her mother is, I believe. She told me she was going in for being a private secretary to some great lady or other. I wish my mother wanted a private secretary, and I would recommend Miss Lammas."

Romont spoke quite seriously, and without any of the affectation of the gallant gay Lothario which is still common to young men of the upper class when they talk of pretty girls of the lower. But his words made Fitzurse wince. This was his own particular sweetheart, this little Vinnie Lammas about whom his companion was talking so easily and cheerily. Not for all the world would he now have the fact known. He felt at that moment as if a gulf had opened between him and Vinnie, and all the time he was distinctly conscious of jealous pangs, as he thought of Vinnie being talked to thus confidentially by this handsome young swell.

"I tell you what," the latter went on, "I don't know of anything more awful than for a pretty and clever girl like that to be forced to live in that beastly place pent up with all these poor miserable people. She never has any amusement of any kind, and I fancy she is very poor—in fact, she told me as much; and she has a good deal of ambition in a sort of way. Do you know what she told me? That she would give a year of her life to go once to a West End party, and be properly rigged out for the occasion. She didn't say rigged out; that's my phrase. But think of that—a bright, pretty girl like that languishing to go to one of these horrible crushes that a man is only longing to run away from the moment he gets into them! By Jove! I should like to get my mother to take her to a West End party, just to let the dear little thing have her night of amusement and gratify her harmless little longing. Mother would do it if she were in town; she'd do it in a moment if I asked her, and never think any harm."

"Oh, it would never do," Fitzurse said hastily.

"No, I don't suppose it would. Besides, Vinnie is engaged—she told me, or as good as told me—to some young fellow over there, and of course if he is a fellow of any spirit he wouldn't let her be taken about in that sort of way to a place where he wasn't going."

"No, of course not," murmured unfortunate Fitzurse. "Are you to see her again?"

"To see Vinnie? Oh no; I don't suppose so. I can't do anything for her; and what would be the good; I'm not one bit mashed

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upon her, and I don't want her to be mashed upon me; and she wouldn't in any case. But she interests me, and she's a dear little Vinnie."

"A dear little Vinnie!" Thus was the girl spoken of, and spoken of, too, without the slightest intention of disrespect, who the very day before had been Fitzurse's ideal of womanhood. So utterly was she below his companion's social range that it seemed quite natural to him to speak of her as "dear little Vinnie;" as if she were a waitress or a lady's-maid. Walter almost hated the young man who thus spoke of her; he almost hated the girl. "Does he call her Vinnie to her face, I wonder?" he asked of his own angry soul. For a moment he thought of having an explanation and a scene with her, and he felt as if he should like to beat her; and then a rush of servile satisfaction came over him at the thought that this would give him all the better excuse for getting rid of her.

The talk passed away from "dear little Vinnie," and went on to many other subjects and persons, concerning most of which Fitzurse knew but little even by hearsay. He kept the strictest watch over his tongue, lest he should betray ignorance of something whereof he was expected to have knowledge, and thereby let his companion know how utterly out of society he was. Once again he felt happy. Nothing on earth, he resolved, should induce him to live any longer at Fitzurseham.

"I suppose you have money of your own?" Romont said, in answer to some observation from Fitzurse about his having soon to look out for new quarters.

"Very little," Fitzurse said carelessly.

"Yes, yes; I think I heard something to that effect. The property all got muddled away, didn't it, long before your time?"

"All gone, pretty nearly," Fitzurse replied, with the air of one to whom money is of small concern.

"Better look out for some girl with a lot of money."

"But you have just been saying you wouldn't do anything of the kind yourself?"

"Ah, well, there's a difference. You see, you would bring a girl a grand old family name; to be Mrs. Fitzurse would be something even in these levelling days that Lady Letitia is so fond of denouncing. If I were a girl with a big fortune I should be delighted to exchange it for such a name. That would be a fair bargain; but I have nothing to offer. It wouldn't be much to be a Mrs. Romont, would it?"

Fitzurse did not know very well what he ought to say under the circumstances, and so he allowed the matter to drop without making any remark. There was, indeed, a fearful joy about this playing at being a man of great family. He was in for it now, and he would not draw back. He had begun by envying his new friend; his bright varied life, his familiarity with good society, his easy circumstances, his charming bachelor quarters in one of

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the best parts of London. Now he was already beginning to feel an air of superiority growing on him. After all, a generous mother, a respectable family, a good place in society, and handsome lodgings off St. James's Street, although excellent in their way, do not exactly constitute a Fitzurse. Walter was getting into a mood to believe that it would not so much matter, after all, if wealth and commerce, laws and learning, were to die, provided only that we were not bereft of our old nobility. He called his new friend "my dear fellow" several times, and with the most easy grace.

The dawn was reddening over silent Fitzurseham when Walter got to his home, his shabby little lodging there. Life had changed absolutely, utterly, for him. The past had suddenly become hateful to him. The joys, the hopes, the ambition of yesterday were despicable in his eyes now. Yet the place which was an odious prison to him yesterday was glorified into a paradise for the moment. The presence of Miss Lisle had changed it as it had changed him. He would do great and glorious things to gain her; he would gain her. He would win a name at which the world should wonder, and then she would not disdain him; she would love him. With heart-throbs of ineffable delight, he whispered to himself that she did not even now disdain him; that she had been very kind to him. He had not dared to ask her if he might call; and indeed, he supposed it would not be proper to ask if he might call on a young unmarried lady; but he had not even ventured to ask permission of Lady Letitia to call on her. What if he should never have a chance of seeing them—of seeing her again? Oh, but that would not be possible; they must meet again. His heart told him that they were destined to meet—it was destiny; it was fate. With that conviction he bore himself proudly. He was now convinced that he was the last living descendant of the great Fitzurse family. He had had secret doubts and misgivings on this subject before, but since he had spoken with Janette Lisle his mind was clear. Not merely was he satisfied that he did come of that proud race, but he was likewise satisfied that he had refrained from asserting his right and his social rank before out of sheer sympathy with the great movement for man's equality. He admired himself doubly: first as an undoubted Fitzurse, and next as a Fitzurse who personally despised the distinctions of rank, and would even have consented not to be known as a Fitzurse. He strode along the grey street with a more lordly air than ever. He was longing to get to his bedroom, in order to have a quiet look at himself in his evening dress. Undoubtedly he did look very well in his evening dress—a garb which does not always become those who wear it for the first time. He had glanced at himself many a time at Lady Letitia's, and had always received new encouragement from what he saw. "I must be a gentleman by birth," he thought proudly to himself, "or how would it come natural to me to wear these clothes and to look so well in them?" Now he was eager to have himself all to himself, to be alone and to have a good study of his

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face and figure before he took off the precious dress-clothes. It was delightful to think that everybody was in bed, and that he could not be seen as he stole to his room.

In all this time he had thought but little about Vinnie. Once or twice it occurred to him that when next they met she might ask him some troublesome questions about the manner in which he had spent his evening. But now suddenly it was borne in upon him that she stood right in the way of his ambition and his love at once. What was the use of forming schemes and plans to win Miss Lisle and wear her, when he was already pledged, engaged, bound hard and fast to this poor little girl in the shabby house in Fitzurseham?

Even the dawn of a summer morning could not make beautiful that end of Fitzurseham in which Fitzurse lived. It was the inland extreme, if we may thus describe it; away from the river, the churchyard, and the rectory. The street was new, comparatively speaking, and consisted of two long rows of stucco-fronted houses, with flights of steps and little patches of dusty enclosure, supposed to have been intended for gardens. Every one of these houses was exactly like the other. The eye turned instinctively away from their gaunt monotony of stucco. They were all exactly in the same condition of premature decay. They were all much too big for the people who lived in them; they were all let out in lodgings; they had all been built under the inspiration of some maniacal idea that wealthy Londoners would come and live in them. Walter had a large bedroom and a sitting-room, and he almost shuddered as he entered his dreary possessions. The blinds in the drawing-room were carefully drawn down, and the dawn was only able to steal in. There was the regulation lodging-house mirror, with its gilt frame shrouded in gauze; there was the gilt and gaudy apron filling up the fireplace; there were the shells to ornament the chimney-piece; there were the wax flowers under a glass shade. He pulled up the blind and looked out of the window, but suddenly drew back as if the one glance had brought some disagreeable sensation with it; and then he relieved his mind by looking in the mirror and studying the effect of his dress-clothes. The effect was consoling, and he went to bed to dream of the West End and of Janette Lisle.

Walter had not reached his lodging wholly unseen of watchful eyes. On the opposite side of the street, a little way up, lived Vinnie Lammas and her mother. It was the sight of their house which had brought with it a disagreeable idea, and sent him from the window. Vinnie had waited for hours after her return from the festivities in the hope of seeing him, of merely seeing him; and now she had seen him, and that was all. She had eluded the tender vigilance of her mother, and persuaded the poor old woman to go to bed in the full belief that Vinnie was going to bed also to have a sound sleep. But the girl did not go to bed; she sat and watched until the dawn came up, and at last she saw Walter return to his home. He had not come near her at the breaking-up of the party

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in Fitzurse House; she and her mother had hung about the grounds until they found that he was positively gone. Vinnie affected to think nothing of it; she even went so far as to assure her mother that she did not expect him to come to her; that he had explained in advance the reasons why he could not do so; that it was all right. She would not admit to her mother, she would not admit to herself, how much her heart misgave her. She went to bed a little comforted by the knowledge that he was near; that she had seen him; that he would be sure to tell her all about it and make everything seem quite right when he came to see her to-morrow—to-day that is; the sun was already up.

Nor was poor Vinnie the only anxious watcher in Fitzurseham that morning. That same dawn found Camiola wide awake, and full of fear and trouble and pain of mind, and thrilling also with emotion that was wild and startling, not all trouble, and that was new to her. Poor Georgie Lisle was tossing feverishly on his bed, and was angry with the hateful day when it began to force its unwelcome companionship on him. The event of the past night had only flung new fuel on the love that consumed him. He kept saying to himself, "She must have me; she must have me. I will kill myself if she refuses; I will tell her so." Over near St. James's Street, Romont was lighting another cigar, and was thinking it would hardly be worth while going to bed at all now: he would go and have a Turkish bath, he thought, as soon as the Hammams opened, and then he would go out of town somewhere for the day. "To think of such a girl being in love with *him*," was the burden of his thoughts, the "him" being Georgie Lisle. "I wish to Heaven I had never seen her," Romont said to himself. "I was all right until I saw her. What a fool I am! I think I'll run down and see dear old mother."

Mrs. Pollen, sitting alone in front of Fitzurse House, had perceived that the dawn was creeping up the sky. "Mr. Merridew and I were having a long talk, Mr. Pilgrim," she explained. "He has just gone. Will you kindly tell the coachman to get ready, please? I am shocked to find that I have kept you all out of bed so long."

"I am not sleepy, madame," said Pilgrim.

CHAPTER XI.

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.

CAMIOLA had a terrible time of it that day. She could not sleep much, although she had not gone to bed until the dawn, for in her heart, as in Hamlet's, there was a kind of fighting that would not let her sleep. When she got up, hoping to find that every one else was still in bed, she became acquainted with the fact that Georgie Lisle was up also. She could not escape him; and he told her of his love all over again. He was more feverish and impassioned

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than ever. He seemed to have lost all power of self-restraint. He protested again and again that he could not live without her, and that if she would not love him he would kill himself. She tried to reason with him; tried to laugh him out of his madness; tried to make him believe, to make herself believe, that he was not serious; that he did not mean what he said. "I am dying of love for you, Camiola," he passionately declared. She made vain appeals to his courage, to his manhood, to his spirit; she grew angry with him, and spoke hot, contemptuous words to him.

"I wouldn't ask a girl to marry me who didn't love me," she said, "if I were a man; I would die first. I wouldn't have a girl who was willing to marry me on such terms. I am ashamed of you, Georgie; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Do you want to drive me out of the house?"

"I don't care," was all he could say. "If you leave the house I'll go after you. I can't live without you, Camiola; and I will not live without you. If you don't have me I'll kill myself."

"I wish you would kill me," Camiola said. "Would that serve your purpose as well, Georgie? It would be better for me to be dead than to be the cause of all this trouble."

Then she burst into tears, and begged of him to leave her; and for the moment he became alarmed at the tempest of grief he had brought up, and he left her. Camiola could think of nothing better than to go and see Mrs. Pollen. Mrs. Pollen seemed a kind woman; and she knew something about Camiola which others did not know. Lady Letitia was not up yet, nor Janette; and Camiola knew that Mrs. Pollen was an early riser. Camiola was a spoilt child in the Lisle household, and was allowed to go where she would and as she pleased. So she left the rectory and sped to Fitzurse House in a faint hope that Mrs. Pollen might have remained there all night. She found Mr. Pilgrim arranging and trimming flower-beds on the lawn. Pilgrim, it was now understood by everybody, was to be retained by Mrs. Pollen as perpetual caretaker of Fitzurse House, whether she should inhabit it or not. He was by temperament and habit a "handy man," and could do almost anything that wanted to be done. One of the reasons why he admired Romont so much was that Romont, too, was a "handy man."

An uneasy light came into Pilgrim's eyes when he saw Miss Sabine. He seemed at once delighted and alarmed. Mrs. Pollen, he told her, had not remained in Fitzurse House; she had gone to her hotel in Dover Street. But she would be certain to be in Fitzurse House some time that day.

Then Camiola ought to have gone back at once to the rectory. But she did not. She had always been in the habit of talking in free and friendly fashion to Pilgrim; and she was glad to be away from the rectory just now; at least until Lady Letitia and Janette were up. It was a relief to her to listen to Pilgrim's slow, quiet, melancholy sentences after Georgie Lisle's wild and sickening ravings. So they walked about the grounds together, and she

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asked him questions concerning the place and its history, and she set him talking about Romont. That was a dangerous subject for her; dangerous especially because Pilgrim was so much of a hero-worshipper that he made of Bertie Romont a positive embodiment of all that is brave, generous, thoughtful, and unselfish in man. It was delightful and it was torturing to Camiola to hear such words spoken, and it made her feel very tender and kind to poor Pilgrim. She turned her eyes on him with gratefulness and sincere regard, and their rays penetrated to his very heart of hearts. Something he said about Romont drew from her a little outburst of feeling which alarmed her; it might almost have betrayed her, she thought, to any one with quicker perceptions than poor, quiet Mr. Pilgrim.

"Let us go down to the river," she suddenly said, determined to turn off the conversation.

There was an ancient water-gate which opened on the strand. A flight of crumbling, oozy steps of stone led down. Camiola and Pilgrim went down the steps and stood upon the edge of the water. The sun was sparkling on the river; it was a morning to fill the heart with poetic tenderness and pathetic feeling. Camiola's nerves had been all unstrung. She found, she could not tell why, the tears come into her eyes.

"Let us go back," she said.

They turned, and as they turned she saw Pilgrim's pale, grey, and wasted face looking paler and greyer and more wasted than ever in the unsparing brightness of the sunlight. The morning seemed so youthful, and his face seemed so old! A great rush of pity came up in her heart. He looked so lonely, so wasted, and so worn; he had no son or daughter to care for him; now as she looked on him, full of those thoughts, he even appeared to her to be feeble. She longed to do something for him; to help him in some way. The lowest step of the flight was high, was broken, was slippery, and not quite easy to mount. Camiola leaped up lightly, and then, turning round with the impulse of one who is conscious of the full possession of youth and strength, she held out a kindly hand to help her elderly companion up. If she had struck him with that hand she could not have brought a look of more sudden and furious anger into his face. He flung back the hand she offered to him and gave a cry as of pain.

"What did you do that for?" he exclaimed, with a flash of strange pale light in his eyes.

"Do what, Mr. Pilgrim? What do you mean? Why are you angry? I thought you might stumble; that step is so slippery, and I wanted to give you a helping hand."

"Come down," said he. As her hand was still outstretched he caught it and drew her towards the strand again. She leaped down. She felt that otherwise she would have been pulled down. "Do you think I am an old man?" he cried. "Do you think I am crippled with age? Do you think I am palsied or a dotard? Look here!"

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He suddenly caught the girl up in his arms as if she were an infant, and ran with her up the steps; leaped from step to step, taking sometimes two steps at a time. When he had reached the gate he opened it with one hand, holding her firmly to his breast with the other. He strode among the paths and the flower-beds and across the lawn until he reached the entrance to the house, and there at last he put the girl on her feet. He did this with ease and care at once. She touched ground so lightly that she hardly felt it. All the time he was carrying her she had not made the slightest resistance; she had not screamed or remonstrated, or indeed uttered a word. She held her breath and kept her presence of mind. Of what avail a scream, a struggle? The place was lonely; not a creature was to be seen. If he had gone mad—and at first she felt sure he had gone mad—there was no help for her but such as her own courage and her own wits could find.

Now she was on her feet again, and she looked into his eyes. They were wild indeed, but she saw no madness there.

"Mr. Pilgrim," she asked, "why on earth did you do that?"

"To show you that I am not an old man, a broken-down old man, as you seemed to think. That's why I took you in my arms as if you were a child and carried you. I could run a mile with you and not draw a long breath."

"But I never said you couldn't; and I am not a weight to be used in champion races or athletic sports of any kind. I don't understand you."

"Are you offended with me?" He spoke despairingly rather than defiantly.

"Much more astonished than offended. It's not a thing to be merely offended at; and I'm not given to taking offence; I am sorry you did it, that's all. Now I must go home."

She still did not dare to be too abrupt with him. She did not even yet feel by any means confident in his sanity, but she did not want any one to come that way and see them; she would rather take her chance. The rustle of some leaves on the ground sent a thrill of alarm through her. What if it should be the sound of Romont's footsteps?

"Can't you guess why I wanted you not to think me an old man?" Pilgrim asked.

"No; I can't guess; except that I suppose no one likes to be thought old; but I didn't think you old—not in that sense."

"You did; you did. You offered to help me!"

"What harm was that? You seemed to me to have stumbled, and you are not as young as I am. I would have given a hand to any one at such a time."

"No; you wouldn't. You wouldn't have thought it necessary to offer a helping hand to—to—oh, to any young man—you know that; you wanted to help me because you looked on me as an old man; and it was kind of you; and sweet of you; everything you do is kind and sweet, to me and to every one else; but it cut me

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to the heart that you should look on me just as an old man and nothing else. I am old enough, God knows; but I am still young in soul; and I felt *that*."

"I am so sorry, Mr. Pilgrim; so very sorry; I never thought it could offend you; and I don't know that *I* should think any the less of you even if you were old." She said this with the memory of poor Georgie's youthful hysterics painfully fresh in her mind. "I must go, Mr. Pilgrim. Good-bye."

"Just a moment," Pilgrim said, coming between her and the way to the gate; "you had better hear it all out now; and there is no reason why you shouldn't, for it only concerns me; it's of no consequence to you. But I should like you to know it just here once for all. Did you ever hear of men who had committed a murder or some such crime and who couldn't keep it to themselves, but must go and tell the story to the woods, or the waters, or the birds of the air? Well, I haven't committed any crime; but I am guilty of a great folly, and I must let it out to you; you must hear my confession. It is this, Miss Sabine; I am in love—with you."

She knew this was coming. The words spoken by Mrs. Pollen the night before came back to her mind; the kindness of a woman may kill a man sometimes! Why had she ever been friendly to this poor man? She felt shame and pity; shame for him and pity for him. How could a man of his age humble himself like that to a girl? It was all inconceivable to her; the possibility of anything of the kind had never occurred to her. "They all say that girls are self-conceited," she thought; "I only wish I had been self-conceited enough to think that this might happen." What was to come next? Was she never to speak to any man on pain of his instantly making love to her? Such thoughts went through her even while she was still speaking.

"I wish you hadn't told me this, Mr. Pilgrim; I don't see what good it can do you. I don't know what I can say or do. I am very sorry, very; but I never thought of anything of the kind."

"Of course you didn't; how could you? I never thought of it myself; I thought I was far too old, and had gone through too much, to feel like that for any woman. I never meant to tell you; it all came out with a rush that time. I think for the moment I was out of my senses; I must have been. But it's done now, and it is a relief to me; you know it, and you will feel for me, and not be angry with me and hate me, as other women would. Don't despise me; oh, pray, Miss Sabine, don't, if you can!"

Camiola's special anxiety now was to get away. She did not despise him; she was not conscious of being angry with him; she was merely perplexed in the extreme.

"I am not angry," she said; "I don't think it a thing to be angry about. I am sorry. I should like to have helped to make you feel happy, and I should like to have pleasant memories of our acquaintanceship always. I always liked you; I always liked to talk to you—and it's a pity, I think."

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Thereupon she broke down, and could not say any more.

"Child," he said, with some energy, "it does you no harm—no more than if you were told that the dog loved you, or the trees and the winds. What does it matter to you if I love you? I couldn't help it, and you couldn't help it. God made you beautiful and good and sweet, and He made me a man with a loving heart, who never had a chance of loving before. Now I'll let you go; only I should just like to hear you say that you forgive me; and perhaps even that you understand me. Try to think what a broken-down poor creature like me must have felt when it made him let out this confession to a girl like you."

"I do understand you; indeed I do; and I forgive you—if there is anything to forgive. I don't know enough to know whether there is or not; and you will get over this. You lead too lonely a life here, I think. You brood over things, and fancies grow on you," and she shook her head, and felt herself becoming preternaturally wise, as she thus reasoned out his case for him.

"Fancies!" he exclaimed, "fancies!"

She was going away, but she could not part from him in anything like unkindness. She held out her hand and he took it and bent his head.

"You won't tell any one?" he said.

"Oh no! I shan't tell any one." She was growing red at the very idea of telling any one.

"God bless you!" he said. "If I were inclined to be an atheist, you would make me believe in God; for there must have been a God to make you; and a God to bless you!" he added with a wild smile, "you—you peerless girl! Good-bye; I'll not trouble you any more, you may depend upon that. You have treated me like a human being; I'll never again act like a brute. Don't think of me any more; I am happy now—in a sort of way. You know my secret; it is like the lifting of a load off my heart to have told it to you. You will keep it to yourself; and you won't laugh at me or think any the worse of me; and now, come what will, I don't care what happens."

There was something in his expression as he said those words which sent a sudden fear through her.

"Mr. Pilgrim," she said gravely, "you will not be careless about your life? You will not think less of it because I am in your confidence; because I am your friend; because I like you so well?"

He did not quite understand her meaning at first. He was perhaps too much occupied with his own thoughts.

"Oh, that is what you mean," he said at last. "Oh no, I shan't do that. Life is much more precious to me now than it was before. And, in any case, do you think I would do anything which could annoy you or give you pain? That would be a poor return for all you have said, wouldn't it?"

"Thank you; that is quite enough," she replied. "It was only

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just a sudden thought of mine, but we understand each other now. You must leave this place; you have talents that are thrown away here. You must go to London, and fight the big fight of your life there, and make a name, and make all your friends applaud you and feel proud of you—as some of them do already."

"Leave this place—where I first saw you; where we are speaking now? No, I'll not do that; I'll live and die here."

Camiola left Fitzurse House. She had no longer any thought of waiting for Mrs. Pollen. She had left the rectory to escape from Georgie; now she found it better, after all, to get back to the rectory again. Her whole ideas were upset; she did not know from what quarter might come the next obnoxious declaration of love. She seemed to be driven like a shuttlecock from one place to another by declarations of love. Nothing is so trying, so hateful, to some girls as an unexpected and unwelcome declaration of love. Sometimes it does not even flatter a girl's self-conceit; it rather hurts and humbles it. "What have I done to bring all this on me?" Camiola kept asking of herself. "I must have done something wrong; I must have given some sort of encouragement by my manner, or I should not have these things said to me." She felt miserable; all the more so because she could not tell any one of her troubles. Only yesterday she was still happy; a few days before that she had no thought that was not happy. Now everything was changed; she felt no surety about anything. After what had happened what might not happen?

When he saw the gate of Fitzurse House close behind her, Christian Pilgrim flung himself down flat on the ground, and grovelled there. The excitement had all gone, and he felt only hopeless pain and a shame that burnt into his very heart.

CHAPTER XII.

"WELL, I WILL MARRY THEE—ALAS!"

Some of the days that followed were the saddest Camiola's life had yet known. Georgie Lisle forbore for a while to press her with his love-making; but he seemed miserable, and his health was not being restored; he was growing worse and weaker every day, and he looked unutterable things. Camiola felt only too sure that the whole story would come out before long. Georgie would certainly betray himself; Lady Letitia would suspect; would ask him; would press him; and he would tell her all; and then Camiola would be put in the odious light of a vain girl, who was allowing a generous boy to pine and die for love of her. "Why should I not marry him?" she sometimes asked herself. "If it would make him and Lady Letitia happy, what could I do better?" Then the thought would come up that she did not love him; that he was not a man whom she could ever bring herself to love; and that if she did marry him, and did ever again see the man she could have loved,

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she would be miserable. She was angry with herself, and despised herself for her wild feeling towards Romont; but there it was, distinct and clear, a part of her life as surely as any physical fact that went to make up that life. She was in love with Romont; and her reason as well as her feeling inspired her. She knew that he was as surely the manner of man whom she could love and look up to, of whom she could make a hero, as Georgie was not and never could be. In moments of perplexity and pain it occurred to her that she ought to marry Georgie, if only to prevent people from finding out that she had been so weak, so unwomanly, as to fall in love with a man whom she hardly knew, who cared nothing about her, who was never thinking of her.

Meanwhile she saw nothing of Romont. He had gone down to the country, she heard some one say; anyhow, he did not come to Fitzurseham. Mrs. Pollen was a good deal away also; and when she was at Fitzurseham, was very busy apparently with the fitting up of her house. Walter Fitzurse came to the rectory almost every day, and rode and walked with Lady Letitia and Janette, and sometimes found opportunity for a quiet walk with Janette alone. For all her own heart-trouble, Camiola retained the keen use of her eyes, and could see that this young pair were coming to have all the ways of lovers, and she wondered whether Lady Letitia observed this, and what she thought of it.

One night Camiola was alone in her room and very melancholy. The hour for bed had come, and the family had all dispersed, but Camiola was not inclined to sleep, and so she remained in her bedroom trying to read, and sometimes looking out of her window across the river, and feeling the vague longing of a schoolboy to run away—anywhere, out of the region of her present troubles. A low subdued knocking at her door startled her. Some bad news about Georgie, she thought at once. Georgie is very sick.

She opened her door, and saw Janette in a dressing-gown, with her hair about her shoulders, and with an expression of intense solemnity on her pretty little childlike face.

"May I come in, Camiola? I want to talk to you; I am so glad you are not in bed."

"Come in, dear. Is it anything about Georgie? Is he not well?"

"About Georgie?" Janette looked so utterly surprised that Camiola began to be afraid her own story and Georgie's must have told itself to her visitor. "What's the matter with Georgie?"

"I don't know, Janette; but of course he isn't very well, and I thought perhaps he had grown worse, and that you had come to tell me something about him."

"No, Camiola dearest; I only want to talk about myself."

Camiola knew what was coming now. The girls sat down side by side. Camiola waited.

"Can you guess what I want to talk about?" Janette asked, fixing her round and widely opened eyes on Camiola.

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"Well, yes; I think so, Janette. Is it anything about Mr. Fitzurse?"

"About Walter Fitzurse, yes; now you know."

"You are in love with him?" Camiola spoke, it must be owned, in the tone of one who would say, "I wish you were not."

"I adore him. He is my hero and my idol; I could not live without him." Janette was always earnest and solemn; this time her earnestness and solemnity were almost preternatural.

"More trouble in this unlucky household," Camiola thought. "What nuisances we boys and girls must be to our unfortunate elders! Now I must talk all sort of commonplace wisdom to this poor little thing; as if I were not myself ten times more silly than she is."

"Are you going to marry him, Janette?"

"Oh yes," Janette answered in a low tone and looking down. "He—he loves me, you know."

"I should think he does," Camiola said, in a voice that seemed to say, "It would be like his impudence if he didn't."

"But you know, Camiola, it is so good of him; for I am so much beneath him in character; so utterly unworthy of him. He is so high-souled; his aspirations are all so unselfish and so unworldly; he longs so for the better days that are to come to humanity on this earth. I can only look up to him. But he says I am essential to his life; to the development and completion of his nature; he needs me—oh! he is so good. And do you know, Camiola, even in mere worldly rank he is much above me, for he belongs to so great a family. But he doesn't care about rank and all that sort of thing—and of course I don't, and you don't, Camiola; I have often heard you say you didn't. He wouldn't take a title if it were offered to him."

"Wouldn't he, dear? How very good of him!" Camiola said.

Janette looked up at her. "I know you don't quite appreciate him. You never did, I am afraid."

"Well, you see, Janette, it wouldn't do if we were all to appreciate him in the same sort of way, would it? It wouldn't do if I were to be your rival and try to poison you—as I suppose I should have to do."

"Still, I know you can be just to him and to me all the same; and so I trust you, Camiola." The little girl's eyes were sparkling with tears.

"My sweetest Janette, is there anything in the world I would not do for you? What do you want me to do for you in this? You don't want advice, I suppose?"

"No," Janette answered, shaking her head gravely; "I don't want advice; my mind is made up. So is Walter's. I want you to tell mamma."

"Oh, good gracious! My dear Janette, why not tell her yourself?"

"I meant to tell her, but I think I would rather you told her,

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Camiola. She would take it better from you. Besides, you could argue the point better—you could defend him, and show that I am not acting unwisely, but very, very wisely, and all for my own good."

"But if I don't think so, Janette? If I can't think so?"

"Oh, but you must think so," and poor Janette's face contorted for a moment in sudden pain and alarm. "You must think so, Camiola, when I tell you that I could not live without him: that I must die; that I will die if I am not allowed to marry him; that I adore him. You must, you must think that it is for my good to marry him. Oh, you will help me in this; you will not desert me?"

What could Camiola do but kiss and kiss Janette and cry over her and promise her anything? How could she talk commonplace wisdom to the enraptured child; she who felt that there was so little of commonplace or any other kind of wisdom in herself? It was arranged before the girls parted for the night that Camiola was to find the very first suitable opportunity of telling Lady Letitia that Janette and Walter Fitzurse were in love and were resolved to be married, and that she was to employ all the resources of her argumentative and persuasive skill to induce Lady Letitia to take the matter in good part and consent to the marriage. If Lady Letitia was willing, Mr. Lisle, the girls agreed, could easily be talked over into giving his consent. Camiola felt like a traitress to her dear friends, the Lisles, in making this promise. She had never liked or trusted Walter Fitzurse. There was something of antipathy in her feeling to him. She felt vaguely alarmed at the prospect of Janette becoming his wife; and yet she knew only too well that where Janette had once set her heart, thither her passion and her resolve would surely lead her by one way or the other. Camiola passed a much more disturbed and distressed night than Janette did. Janette, indeed, was already cheered and made happy by the pledge of her friend's assistance and support.

Next morning, however, there was no opportunity for Camiola to act her mediating part. The explosion she was herself expecting came. Georgie Lisle renewed his supplications to her, and failing once again, rushed to his mother and told her all, and besought her to use her influence to prevail on Camiola. Lady Letitia was overwhelmed with surprise. Her first feeling after the surprise was anger against her son; her next, vexation with Camiola. She went at once to Mr. Lisle's study, and told him all.

"It is terrible either way," Lady Letitia said; "terrible. To seen one's boy in such a state is more than I can bear; and how can I press Camiola? She told him she doesn't love him, and that she never could; and how can I press her?"

"I wouldn't press her," the Rector said hastily. "Certainly *I* will have nothing to do with it. Let Georgie pull himself together and behave like a man, not like a silly child. Most men have had something of the kind to put up with some time in their lives, and have got over it. Let him do the same. I must speak to him."

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"I don't think there would be any use in speaking to him—at least just yet. It would be better not to show any want of sympathy; he would only feel it the worse. He is not like other young men; he never was. He is too sensitive, and he is madly in love with her. I am afraid he will do some harm to himself. After all, he would be a very fond husband; and many girls are very happy although the love was not on their side. It might grow in time; I think it would with a girl of Camiola's affectionate nature."

"I see you are giving way already, Letitia, and I am sorry for it. If I see Camiola and have any chance of giving her my advice, I shall strongly advise her not to do anything of the kind."

"It is very hard upon me, St. George, because the poor boy keeps telling me that Camiola would have him if I asked her, and I dare say she would; and I would ask her readily enough if it weren't for her money. People would say that we had drawn her into this marriage because of her money. That is the very thing I always dreaded."

"Letitia, I don't think that is the way to look at it. If I thought it was right and for Camiola's happiness to advise her to marry Georgie, I shouldn't mind what people said. People are always saying something disagreeable. But I don't think it would be right; I don't think he is the man Camiola would be able to love with her whole heart. How could a girl like that feel proper respect for a young man who goes on as that unfortunate boy is going on? I am sure I couldn't."

"But girls don't feel like that, St. George; they don't think the less of a man because he makes a fool of himself about them. My dear, I remember you were very crazy yourself at one time."

"I never would have tried to drive you and drag you into marriage, Letitia, if I knew that you didn't care about me."

"No," said Lady Letitia, with a faint smile, the first that had come on her pretty little face for some hours; "I am afraid I showed my hand very soon in that game, St. George. But we must think of the poor dear boy. After all he is our son, our only son; and I dare say I did a great deal to spoil him. Then, you see, one good thing is, Camiola does not care for any one else; if she did of course that would make a difference."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," the Rector said, anxious now only to escape. "Take care what you are doing, Letitia." At the threshold of the house he met Camiola. He stopped and took both her hands, and said to her affectionately, "Camiola, my dear girl, don't let any one, *any* one, persuade you into doing what you don't yourself wish to do. You know what I mean, or you will very soon know; and remember what I say to you. Come to me for counsel and help if you want either. Follow the dictates of your own heart and your own conscience, my dear, and you will do right."

He went away, and she entered Lady Letitia's room much perturbed.

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"This is terrible, my dear," Lady Letitia said to her, beginning her appeal with just the same words as she had used to her husband, and indeed they expressed exactly what she felt on the subject; "terrible! I have just come from my unfortunate boy; he is in such a dreadful state; I really don't believe he can live; I don't indeed."

"Oh, my dearest Lady Letitia, I can't see you in such trouble; I can't see you all in such trouble; you whom I love; and I do love poor Georgie too; I love him like a brother, only I do wish he was not so weak and silly. But I'll do anything you like; I'll do anything you ask me. What does it matter whom I marry or what becomes of me, as long as I give you any happiness? Mr. Lisle has just told me to follow the dictates of my own heart and conscience. I am sure my heart and conscience could not tell me to do anything better than to act as you would wish me to do; you couldn't advise me wrong. I'll do whatever you ask me, dear, dearest Lady Letitia. Go and tell Georgie so." She flung her arms fondly round Lady Letitia's neck, and they shed affectionate tears over each other. Then after a minute or two of this relaxation Lady Letitia gently disengaged herself and said—

"No, Camiola, my love; this shan't be. I have had a better feeling given to me; I am not so weak as I was; I will not ask you to make this sacrifice. You are too good and dear a child for that; and I ought to be more like a mother to you. The boy shall not have it all his own wilful way. It is better he should be disappointed than that you should be sacrificed. I'll go and tell him so this moment."

Alas! this was only the way to make Camiola more resolute than ever in her sacrifice. Lady Letitia did not mean this; for the moment she really meant what she said. She felt a stronger and a better will rising up within her, and she would have gone and told Georgie her resolve if Camiola had allowed her; but Camiola would not. It seemed to the girl that it would be better to be married at once and done with it; put out of the reach of any more persecution. Her late experiences had cast her into a mood to seek refuge and shelter anywhere; and to a girl marriage seems almost as secure a retreat from the troubles of the outer world as death itself. Besides, when she got married she would be done with her absurd fancy for Romont; so she said to her own heart. She would make the whole family of the Lisles happy; she would secure herself from foolish love-fancies of her own, and from the persecution of other people's love-fancies. Oh yes; she saw her way growing quite clear before her.

For the moment, however, Lady Letitia would not yield. She insisted that Camiola must think the matter over once more before deciding; and Camiola promised to think it over, being quite decided in her own mind all the time. So the day went by, and she had said nothing about Janette's love-affair; and that very evening Janette came to her breathless, and drew her aside, and began with looks of intense earnestness—

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"Camiola dear; you didn't say anything about *that* to-day?"

There was only one business in the world for Janette now, and it was *that*.

"No, Janette dear," Camiola said, rather penitently. "I hadn't much of a chance, you know. I thought it would not be well."

"Oh, I am so glad; I *am* so glad. Please don't say a word to any one; please, please don't."

"No? Have you changed your mind? Has anything happened?"

"Changed my mind, Camiola? I wonder at you. No, indeed; I never could change. But I have seen Walter, and he does not wish; he is particularly anxious that nothing should be said to any one just yet. He has reasons, the best reasons; I leave all to his judgment. Promise me this, Camiola—oh, you are so kind and good; promise me that you will not say a word to any one until I ask you again."

What could Camiola do but promise? Perhaps if she had been less troubled with her own affairs she might have suspected something in this change of purpose, but she suspected nothing, and felt it a relief not to have to open the matter to Lady Letitia.

There was a strong family likeness between Georgie Lisle and his sister Janette. Both were impulsive, impetuous, sentimental, effusive, even hysterical; both were capable of any amount of illusion and delusion; self-delusion not the least. But there was one great difference which, out of qualities that otherwise might have been absolutely the same, sent forth two human creatures with tendencies totally different. Georgie was an egotist; Janette was not. Janette's affections, loves, hopes, dreams, ambitions, were all for others, and of others. Poor Georgie's egotism made him in many ways merely selfish. He could not conceive in his own mind the idea of self-sacrifice. He could not understand it; it never appealed to him; it made no part of his existence. He was madly in love with Camiola, and he merely thought of marrying her for his own sake, because he loved her. Janette had fallen madly in love with Walter Fitzurse, and she thought morning and night only of what would please him; what would suit him and serve him, what would bring her people to love him. It was for his sake solely that she consented not to speak out openly to her father and mother, tell them of her strong love, and ask them to allow her to marry her lover. Walter would not have this; and she urged it no more. He told her that their only safe course was to make their marriage certain in the first instance; and she thought it was for him to say. Nobody could understand her welfare, she was satisfied, so well as the man who loved her, and whom she loved. She would positively have consented to give him up if that would be for his good.

Some days of monotonous and unspeakable dreariness followed. The Rector's house brooded in gloom. Poor Georgie continued very unwell; so unwell that all talk of love and marriage was put

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aside for the moment; and this in itself was something of a relief if not an actual comfort to Camiola. But the face of Lady Letitia bore always a melancholy, half-reproachful expression as she looked at Camiola. "What have you done, what are you doing with my boy?" she seemed to ask. "Have you killed him, him whom Providence allowed to get over the danger of the savage enemy's spear?" Lady Letitia was far too kind and was too much of a Christian woman to say anything like this to Camiola; and in her calmer moments she recognized the cruel injustice of such a thought. But her boy was ailing; her boy was weak; her boy was dying perhaps; and if Camiola had been more kind to him in time she might have saved him. People don't die of love now, to be sure, Lady Letitia admitted to herself; but Georgie might not have been sick at all if it had not been for his fatal passion. Lady Letitia did not know anything of the re-opening of Georgie's physical wound on the unlucky night of the entertainments at Fitzurse House. If she had known she would have found but another and much stronger reason for holding Camiola Sabine responsible for the illness and the danger of her boy. Camiola began to think in despair, "I cannot stand this any longer. If Georgie recovers—and oh, please God, he will recover—I will marry him; I will do anything they all like; what does it matter about me?"

One drear, windy, wintry, wild, cold evening, when summer seemed to have suddenly dropped out of the sky, Camiola utterly gave way. Georgie was getting better.

"Oh, Lady Letitia, you must tell poor, dear, foolish Georgie that of course I'll marry him, since he really wishes it. I am following the dictates of my own heart and my conscience when I say that I will do what I know you would all like me to do; and I like it myself; I do indeed. Now, I will go and tell Georgie myself—but you must come with me."

Camiola suddenly remembered that her announcement to her lover would probably be the signal for a storm of kisses if she were alone with him, and she shrank from this prospect with a shuddering sensation that did not seem the natural prelude to a happy bridal.

"Won't you go to him yourself, Camiola? Don't you think Georgie would rather hear it from your own lips without any one else being there?"

"No, dearest—at least I don't know; but I couldn't do that; I couldn't indeed. You must come with me."

Lady Letitia's heart sank within her. She understood Camiola's reluctance. She could not help seeing only too plainly that Camiola's was a mere sacrifice.

"Camiola," she said, staying the girl with one hand, "I am afraid you have not thought enough of this."

"Oh yes, I have thought quite enough; I don't want to think about it any more."

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Little Alice suddenly bounced into the room with angry cheeks and eyes of fire.

"Don't do it, Camiola," the child exclaimed; "don't marry Georgie —he's a bad, nasty, selfish, silly boy; and you shan't marry him. I don't love him any more; not one bit, for he wants to take you away."

Alice kissed Camiola passionately and clung to her.

"But, Alice dear, he is not going to take me away; I am to be here always."

"He *will* take you away," the child repeated; "I know he will. People always go away when they are married. Mr. Fitzurse is going to take Janette away."

"For shame, you silly child," Lady Letitia said, turning crimson with surprise and anger. "How can you say such things? Who told you to say that? What do you mean?"

"No one told me; but I know it all the same," Alice said doggedly. "Janette is going to marry Mr. Fitzurse, and he will take her away; and I am fonder of Camiola now; and I won't have her taken away. I'll go and tell Georgie that he shan't."

This created something like a diversion in Lady Letitia's mind, and for a moment Georgie's love-pangs were forgotten. The child was talking nonsense, she thought, utter nonsense; she was always saying odd things. But a boding chill went through Lady Letitia nevertheless. Was there a new trouble before her, of which, up to that moment, she had never dreamed?

"Where is Janette?" she asked. "Do you know, Camiola?"

"Janette is gone out with Mr. Fitzurse," Alice promptly answered; "I know she is."

Alice was right. Janette was at this moment with Walter in the old churchyard. The two were pacing slowly up and down, just as he and Vinnie used to pace up and down the other day, and Walter was pouring his schemes and plans, his hopes and his love, into Janette's delighted, enraptured ear. Besides that she had a very loving and faithful little heart, she had a little head crammed full of what she considered new ideas about man's brotherhood and equality—ideas which must have been already making youthful converts in the earlier days of the family of Noah. The quiet, well-ordered, somewhat limited life of the rectory, with its pre-established doctrines and dogmas appointing every one's duty, had set little Janette longing for some eccentricity and extravagance of social philosophy. Walter was a wholly new figure to her; his way of life, his talk, his ambition, his courage, his audacious love-making, were all new, strange, and intensely fascinating.

"And you love me, darling?" he whispered.

"Love you?" she murmured. "Oh yes, you know it."

"If I ask you, you will come with me; you will trust yourself to me? We will go and be married before we tell any one, and then they cannot part us."

"I will go anywhere with you; I will do anything you think right," she said, looking up to him with loving, trusting eyes.

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Then he stooped and kissed her for the first time, It was a moment of intense rapture to both. To her it was the first kiss of her lover; to him it was the first kiss of an earl's granddaughter—the first kiss of a born lady.

It is not a good thing for a mortal to attempt to play the part of a providence or a destiny to other mortals. All legend, classic or otherwise, is full of warning on that subject. The bravest enterprise begun with this vain hope is likely to come to mere failure; the best intentions to beget only the poorest and most perverse results. We shall not attempt to justify the ambition of Mrs. Pollen to play the part of providence or destiny to the people of Fitzurseham; we only state the fact that she had such an ambition, and tell what came of it in certain instances. She was a noble-hearted woman, and whatever her faults, her attempts in Fitzurseham were inspired mainly by a sincere desire to do good to some of her fellow-creatures. She had, indeed, always before her the thought of making atonement for her supposed or fancied neglect of her husband; but in truth her chief desire now was to make people happy. Along with that, however, there was a certain delight, keen and ever renewing, in the sense of power which her money and her schemes of benevolence gave her. She liked making experiments in human character and seeing how she could mould it, and how it would turn out. This was her most dangerous and most tempting pastime. She had been thus experimenting with Walter Fitzurse. She was anxious to know how he would turn out if a chance were given to his real character to assert itself. It was not quite clear to her for a while whether the good or the bad predominated in his nature; and she said to her own conscience that she was opening the way for the good to prove itself and take its place. But how if the good should not prove the stronger? How if the bad were to get the upper hand? Would not her experimenting then only prove the means of furnishing Walter Fitzurse's worst enemy with weapons to slay Walter Fitzurse's best friend? Mrs. Pollen had not asked herself that question when she was making her mind up to give Fitzurse's ambition a chance in life, and now already, so soon, she was beginning to doubt whether the bad was not showing itself in ascendancy over the good.

She had given Fitzurse money with which to begin his career as a student at the bar, and to keep him like a gentleman for the present. She had allowed him to understand that money should not be wanting to him if he showed a desire and a capacity to make a name for himself in the world. The want of a fair start, she knew, had often spoiled many a career that would otherwise have been honourable, noble, beneficent; and she was determined that his chances should not thus be marred. "I can only give you the horse," she told him, disparaging her own bounty. "It is for you to ride the race. If you win, the honour is yours and not mine." It was not necessary for her to disparage her own bounty. Walter was not over-scrupulous; he was quite willing to be fed from her

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hand. He took it as something due to his own genius and his own commanding attributes. Besides, she had told him of her hopes for the discovery of a long-lost relationship in Fitzurseham; and he soon began to think that she had already found out that he was the missing relative. He felt sure of this before she had yet thought fit to tell him of it. Anyhow, he took her generosity and good wishes altogether as something due to him, and for which he was bound, indeed, to be openly thankful, but which did not bring with it the slightest taint of personal humiliation. He was absorbed by one great overmastering purpose: he was resolved to marry Janette Lisle. This, it seemed to him, would be a magnificent start in life. He knew that the Lisles were not rich; not rich, that is, in the sense that Mrs. Pollen was rich, or even that Miss Sabine was rich; but they would give their daughter some money; and once he were married to her they must do something for him. He knew very well that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were not by any means a Capulet and his wife, who would turn their backs for ever on a daughter because she had married without their consent; who would say to Janette Lisle when she had become Janette Fitzurse, "Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee." No; once Janette and he were married there would be a welcome in the family for him; he would be received among aristocrats; his place would be sure; his prospects cared for. His ambition was for society; he would rather be the husband of Lady Letitia Lisle's daughter than of the richest plebeian heiress in the land. He assumed that the Lisles would not give their consent to the marriage if asked for it beforehand; and he had therefore made up his mind to run away with their daughter. In any case he preferred this way of attaining his end. It would be more striking, more romantic, more splendid, better as *réclame*.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MUSIC-ROOM.

THE decision was taken and was announced. Camiola told Georgie Lisle in his mother's presence that she would marry him. The ceremonial, if it may be called so, was not exactly gladsome. Georgie, indeed, was feverishly overjoyed, and seemed to think that Camiola's promise ensured a positive change in their natures and destinies. Lady Letitia read only of sacrifice in Camiola's eyes, and thought that the girl would not be happy, and wondered what Mr. Lisle would say, and what people generally would say. Meanwhile Janette and Fitzurse had not returned.

It was now about half-past six on the evening of the strange sort of day which we have described, which anticipated late autumn or even winter itself at a season when summer was still not past its prime. Camiola felt that the blown clouds and the wind and the harsh wintry skies were congenial with her mood. She had

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made up her mind that, come what would, she must see Mrs. Pollen at once; for she had heard by chance that Mrs. Pollen was at Fitzurseham. Camiola had of late been feeling herself drawn more and more into sympathy with Mrs. Pollen; and Mrs. Pollen knew more about her than any other woman did. Nor was she thinking only about her own trouble. She was thinking much about Janette's love for Fitzurse, and Lady Letitia's sudden alarm. Camiola had positively promised Janette not to tell anything about her to any one for the present, and she did not see how she could break that promise, and yet it seemed hardly right of her to know so much and keep it all—keep any hint of it—from the knowledge of Lady Letitia. This was another reason why she must see Mrs. Pollen, and try to get from her some idea as to Walter Fitzurse's real character and prospects—after having confided to Mrs. Pollen her own story; for she felt that she must confide it, that she could not bear the burthen if she had to keep it to herself.

Camiola was not afraid of meeting Christian Pilgrim again, although she would much rather not meet him. She was a girl of spirit, with a high sense of honour, and inclined, therefore, to put much trust in the honour of others. Pilgrim had told her he would never trouble her with love-making again, and she felt a full reliance in his promise. She would much rather not see him, but it was certain that she would have to see him many times in the future, and it little mattered when. She would have time enough to go to Fitzurse House and have quite a long talk with its owner, and get back and be ready for dinner. In any case she preferred not to be in the rectory when Janette returned; for she feared there would be some sort of a scene, and that she might be brought into it without any capacity on her part to make things the better for anybody. In what way Mrs. Pollen could help her or help anybody concerned, she had no idea, and did not stop to think. Mrs. Pollen generally managed to impress those who knew her with the conviction that she was a woman who could suggest something helpful in any manner of human emergency. So Camiola left the rectory and made for Fitzurse House.

The day was falling amid stormy cloud and boding of bad weather. The steps of the Old Ferry Inn were splashed by sullen waves lashing themselves into anger; chains and ropes were groaning and creaking everywhere; the trees in the churchyard bent their heads and moaned; the water was of livid steel-like colour. It would have needed very high animal spirits indeed to keep one from a boding sense of approaching evil of some kind, on such an evening and in such a place. Camiola had enough of genuine and personal reason for depression to be proof against any mere omen of cloud or wind. Her heart was beating so loudly that she could hear the sound at intervals, when the wind was hushed for a moment. Yet, burthened as she was with her own expectations of trouble, she could not repress a shudder of mere physical gloom and awe as she looked in through the railings of

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the churchyard and saw the tombs and the graves in that ghastly twilight.

She hurried on, struggling against the wind at corners, and fearing sometimes that she must be blown right off her feet. She got somehow to Fitzurse House. The great gate was closed, but there was a smaller side gate which she knew was always open until very late at night. She made her way in and looked around her. There was no light in any of the front windows, although the dusk had gathered heavily over the forlorn place. For a moment Camiola felt as if she were venturing on some fateful errand to some dread lone home of enchantment.

Fitzurse House was still in an unfinished condition. All day long workmen were busy there. Mrs. Pollen was gradually reclaiming or reconstructing room after room; but it was not yet in a condition to be called a dwelling-house, much less a home. Mrs. Pollen never slept there. No one, in fact, slept there but Christian Pilgrim. When Mrs. Pollen came there in the day she generally brought her maid with her, and took the maid back to her town lodging at night. Mrs. Pollen went and came in the most irregular manner, and was pleased to be allowed to come and go without officious attendance or questions asked. When the workmen had gone for the evening she was sometimes absolutely alone in the house. She often despatched Christian Pilgrim to execute some commission for her, sent her maid somewhere else, and remained in the house alone. Perhaps when Christian or the maid returned, Mrs. Pollen was gone. If she had not to dine in town, she sometimes had a morsel of dinner brought to her in Fitzurse House, and stayed there until late in the night. She had been a long time in the habit of doing as she pleased—so she used to say—and it pleased her to do as she pleased.

Camiola, therefore, did not feel by any means assured that because Mrs. Pollen had been in Fitzurse House an hour before, she must necessarily be in Fitzurse House now. The great front door was closed; but Camiola knew her way to one of the side doors, and she found it invitingly open, and saw light streaming from some of the rooms in that part of the house. She went in, and was guided in her quest by the soft sound of an organ, played in low tone and with a touch that somehow seemed to say the organist was listening to something else while waking the sound of the keys. Camiola knew at once that Mrs. Pollen was in the music-room, which she was having constructed, and in which she took immense pride and interest. Camiola had not yet seen it. Following the guidance of the music, she soon came in sight of the half-open door of a room, at the end of a long corridor or gallery. As she came near this the organ ceased its sound, and she heard Mrs. Pollen say in a high and animated tone—

"Tell the truth, then; tell the whole truth. Go to the girl fairly and openly, and tell her, and then I will help you if I can. But I'll not stand any deceits. Tell her that you are no more a

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Fitzurse than I am, and if she doesn't mind, then take your chance. But let us have the truth, if you want help or countenance from me."

Camiola was actually knocking at the door, to stop any further utterances not meant for her, when these last words were spoken. She would have given much that she had not heard them; she would have been rejoiced to get away even now. But it was too late. The voices ceased.

"I came to look for you, Mrs. Pollen," Camiola said almost breathless. "Have I disturbed you? May I come in?"

"Come in, you darling girl? of course you may come in. I am delighted to see you. It's only Mr. Fitzurse. He has been admiring my music-room. Don't you admire it? All my own ideas. We shall have many a concert here. How do you like the effect of the light?"

The room was a beautiful amphitheatre, with very long enclosing arms and a narrow platform, making the chord of the arc. On the platform stood an organ. All round the cornices just beneath the ceiling ran a succession of lights, concealed and softened by screens of pearly glass. The light filled the room, but no lamp or burner was to be seen; no point of distracting lustre. Beneath there were windows, now so heavily curtained that no streak of the pallid twilight was seen within, and no gleam could have shone out upon the night. There was a great fireplace with much creamy marble and tiles. The roof looked like an inverted shell. There were no actual adornments—no spangles, so to speak. The form and colour of the music-room were its ornamentation.

Not much, perhaps, in the humour for artistic admiration, Camiola nevertheless did admire the room, the marbles, the tiles, the noble organ, the music-stands and instruments, the soft involving light. She had, however, first to exchange a greeting with Walter Fitzurse, who was looking embarrassed and sullen when she came in. There was a sort of insolence, too, of something like triumph and defiance in his manner now, Camiola thought.

"By the time I have this great old house all finished," Mrs. Pollen said, "it will be about the proper period for me to die. No matter; I will leave it to some charming person, who shall make it look beautiful by her presence; and she will sit here of evenings and play delicious things on that organ; and I shall hear her—oh yes, I shall hear her."

"Even in death?" Fitzurse asked.

"Why not? I suppose you don't believe in anything to come after death, Mr. Fitzurse? I am told it is not the way with clever young men now to believe anything."

"Oh, pardon me, I didn't say that," Walter hastened to interpose. He cast an alarmed glance at Camiola. Unbelief might be a very fine thing in its way, and show off well under proper conditions, but it would never do if Miss Sabine were to be allowed to tell the people at the rectory that Walter Fitzurse was an unbeliever.

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"I am glad," Mrs. Pollen said quietly, in her deepest tone. She saw through him with one quick, penetrating glance. "You are looking at that curtain, Miss Sabine? It puzzles you?"

For there was a heavy curtain of pearl-grey plush, which hung down apparently for no purpose at one side of the room.

"Yes; it's a beautiful thing in itself, but I don't quite understand what it is doing there."

"This is the idea, you see." Mrs. Pollen lifted an edge of the curtain, and showed that there was a small door, itself also curtained, behind it. "That door opens out on the lawn. I mean to have it locked, but each of my few special friends shall have a key. They can come in from the grounds without passing through the house, and go in the same way. That shall be the privilege of my friends; and then we have only to lock the door on the corridor side and we shall be safe from all dull intruders. We shall want nobody but those who have the privileged key. You shall have a key, Miss Sabine, of course: and then you can come and play here whenever you like without any trouble of ringing at doors and being shown in by servants. I have promised Mr. Fitzurse a key also—if he will be good and do everything I tell him to do."

"You may trust me," Walter said fervently.

"Yes? Well, I do trust you. Stay, I will get you both your keys. Don't go a moment, Mr. Fitzurse."

These latter words reassured Camiola, who began to fear her visit would all come to nothing. "Don't go a moment," clearly meant, "you are to go after a moment."

Mrs. Pollen left the room.

"Is Janette at home, Mr. Fitzurse?" Camiola asked quickly.

"Oh yes; at least I suppose so. Miss Lisle was going home when I left her."

"I am glad," Camiola said emphatically.

"You know all," Fitzurse said, approaching her and speaking in a tone little above a whisper; "she told me. You know our secret; you know that we love each other. You will not betray us?"

"I have promised Janette. I am afraid I did wrong, but I have promised, and I suppose I must keep my word. But you will go to Mr. Lisle or Lady Letitia, and speak to them?"

"They would hate me, because I am poor."

"Oh no, no; not if she loved you. They are too fond of her. They would do anything for her. Mr. Fitzurse, you will not bring this child into a quarrel with her father and mother?"

At this moment Mrs. Pollen came back. She gave to Camiola a dainty little key of silver. "That is your passport and your pledge of eternal welcome," she said; "and, Mr. Fitzurse, here is the key I meant for you. Oh—another thing I want you to notice. You see that little box?" she pointed to a handsome casket, not very little, that stood on a table. "Each of these keys opens that too; and I generally keep some money in it. Money is always

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wanted for something or other here, while all this work is still going on; and if I should not be here, or Mr. Pilgrim, I should be glad that my friend who happened to be in the way should know where a few sovereigns could be had to pay wages and that sort of thing. I pay my own wages; I don't contract in the ordinary way; I much prefer to do my own work. Of course, Pilgrim generally does the actual business of paying; but still I have to do it myself sometimes."

She opened the casket and showed a great deal of gold.

"I think you keep too much money lying about in a place like this," Walter said.

"Nobody knows, except Pilgrim, and a few of us. The ordinary burglar would never think of looking for money in a music-room and a lady's glove-box. One must have money on hand here; a cheque would sometimes paralyze the resources of Fitzurseham."

"Still, there are a great many bad characters about Fitzurseham, and I strongly recommend you to be cautious."

"My dear friend, I am cautious. I have lived in countries and slept in places where your host would cut your throat for the value of one of your rings, if only he could do it without being found out. I have learned some lessons in caution, I can assure you. Are you going?"

Yes; he was going. He said good-bye and looked an imploring look into Camiola's eyes as he went.

The moment he was gone Mrs. Pollen set a chair for Camiola, and sat herself down to the organ again; but she did not touch the keys.

"Now, then, Camiola dear," she said, "tell me all about it—something has happened, and you have come to talk to me. Well, what is it?"

"First, it is about me."

"Oh, first it is about *you*. Yes; and next it is about Janette Lisle."

"It is; but how did you know?"

"Well, I knew; now, first about yourself?"

"I have been and done it, Mrs. Pollen," Camiola said, with downcast eyes and a dismal attempt at pleasantry.

"You don't mean to say you have promised to marry that crazy boy—promised to marry Georgie Lisle?"

"I do! I have promised."

"What on earth made you do that?"

"They are all so fond of him; I am so fond of *them*; I owe so much to Lady Letitia; I couldn't see them in trouble about him; and besides, what does it matter? How could I do better with my life? I have a great affection for him; and if I can make him happy is not that the best use I could put my life to? A girl ought to try to make some man happy. Perhaps I am fortunate that there is some one who thinks me necessary to his happiness. It is something to live for. I haven't anything else."

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"Stuff!" Mrs. Pollen vehemently interrupted. "A girl like you ought to know better than that. You have no right to give yourself away to this young man merely to oblige his father and mother. He is a miserable creature who persuades you or allows you to do such a thing. Have you positively promised? are you actually engaged?"

"Yes, Mrs. Pollen, I gave my promise to-day."

"Break it off, then! Tell them you cannot marry him. Speak frankly out to Lady Letitia. Speak to Mr. Lisle. He is a good man, he will understand you. He will not allow you to be talked into such a marriage."

"He has been so good and kind to me. He spoke as kindly and tenderly as if I were his daughter. He told me not to do anything that my heart and my conscience did not justify, and I have followed his advice. I have asked my heart and my conscience, and they do justify it. They tell me that I could not do anything better with my life than to make poor Georgie and Lady Letitia happy. Oh, what other use is life to me?" Camiola stood up and clasped her hands across her forehead. She did not want her tears to be seen.

"Tell me, dear," Mrs. Pollen said gently, "why—if you have resolved on this, and given your promise—why did you come here?"

"I hardly know; oh, I don't know at all. I wanted to tell you, to talk to you; I don't know why."

"I do; I know it even though you may think you don't. Shall I tell you why you came here at once to me, Camiola?"

"No, Mrs. Pollen; at least I don't think I want to know. You might have guessed something wrong."

"I have guessed something and it is not wrong. Come, I'll tell you; and we shall see how your resolve will hold after that."

"Pray don't," Camiola implored, covering her face more closely than ever with her hands.

"Oh yes; I must show you what you are doing. You came to me out of a sort of sympathy, a yearning for sympathy; because I am the only person in the world who knows why you do not love Georgie Lisle; who knows that you do love some one else, and knows who that some one is. That is what forced you to come to me."

There was silence for a moment.

"Come, look up, and talk to me," Mrs. Pollen said, going to Camiola, and gently drawing her hands from her eyes.

Camiola had recovered some of her composure. The worst was known and said now. "But what would be the use, Mrs. Pollen, even if this were so? It is mere folly on my part; sheer madness. I hardly know him at all; I haven't often spoken to him; there never was a word of love-making between us. He never thought about me—you can't call that being really in love with a man."

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"I am romantic enough even yet to be a believer in affinities and love at first sight," Mrs. Pollen said composedly; "and I believe your love for him will last you all your life; and I believe still more that he is just the man you ought to love. These are my sentiments."

"Still, as things are," Camiola said, more courageously, "you see, my loving, whether it is for an age or for all time, couldn't come to anything. I must do my best to forget him; and the surest way of forgetting him is to think of some one else. When I have Georgie Lisle to make happy, that will fill my life for me, and I suppose I shall come to love him in the end. Oh, I have thought over all this; I have not been acting on mere impulse and the spur of the moment. I know my own weakness; but I also think I know where I could be strong. No, you are kind and sweet, and I thank you ever so much; but I think this is right to do, and I think I can do it. So my mind is made up, Mrs. Pollen. I have had my little silly hour or two of raving; and now I am a sensible girl again."

Camiola felt very brave and resolute now.

Mrs. Pollen returned to her organ, and began to play something of Beethoven's. She played with an easy, firm touch, with full tenderness of expression. The music was an impassioned yet subdued lament for lost love and youth; all of regret that is not ignoble, of pathos that is not enervating, seemed to have been breathed into it, to breathe from it.

"Pray don't," Camiola softly pleaded, laying her hand on Mrs. Pollen's arm. "Pray don't play that. I can't stand it just now."

"I meant to touch you, dear," Mrs. Pollen said, looking up with an unspeakable tenderness in her dark and eloquent eyes. "I was trying to speak to your very heart. I wanted to plead there against this cruel sacrifice of all that makes life worth having to a young and generous woman. Well, is it of no use?"

"Of what use could it be? I cannot make myself happy according to my fancies and dreams and follies. But I can make some one else happy; and that will make me happy in the end."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Pollen, "but I don't believe in argument about such things; and a wilful woman will have her way. At all events she won't have it the less for being told she ought not to have it. Well, there was something else you wanted to talk to me about, but I think we may put that off. Nothing will happen immediately; I hope nothing may happen at all. I couldn't think much about anybody's affairs just now, Camiola, but only yours; and so go home, dear. Shall I send some one with you?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Pollen—for what purpose? It is not dark yet, and I should hate to have any one with me."

Mrs. Pollen shook her head sadly. Then she kissed Camiola, and Camiola went away. Not another word was spoken between them.

Mrs. Pollen rang a bell and her maid came.

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"Is Mr. Pilgrim in?"

"He has just come in, ma'am."

"Ask him to come in here, please."

Mr. Pilgrim presently made his appearance, grave, stooped, and melancholy as ever.

"Do you know Mr. Romont's address, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Yes, madame."

Mrs. Pollen wrote a few words on a scrap of paper.

"Will you telegraph that to him for me?"

"Certainly, madame."

As Pilgrim was leaving the room, she said, "I expect Mr. Merridew here in a few minutes. He may come to me at once. Tell me, Mr. Pilgrim, are you at all curious as to Mr. Merridew's visits to me? are you curious to know what we have to talk about, he and I?"

"No, madame. I am not curious about many things; and I assume that you would tell me if there was any occasion for me to know."

"You are quite right in that. I may perhaps have something to tell you to-night after he is gone. There may be something to interest you."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. POLLEN'S ALBANIAN.

ALBERT ROMONT had followed out his purpose and gone to see his mother in the country. His mother had always been his best friend. In her company he found himself a boy, a mere boy, once again. She had married when little more than a child, and she used to say with Goethe's mother that she and her sons were young together. Her eldest son had now been for some time married, and had other loves and interests; and she had always been fonder of her younger boy. Bertie Romont had got into the way of going to his mother when anything in particular had happened, or was likely to happen, either for good or ill; and he confided in her as a school-boy might in his chosen comrade. This time, however, he did not tell his mother what was in his mind; and partly for the reason that there was hardly anything definite to tell. Was he in love with Camiola Sabine? Why, he had hardly seen the girl half a dozen times. He had had but one single talk with her alone—they two alone—and that talk was about nothing. He knew next to nothing about her; he really knew nothing more about her now than he knew the first day he saw her. Surely he could not tell his mother, he could not admit to himself, that he was in love with a girl under such conditions; a girl, too, who was in love with another man, and was going, no doubt, to marry him. One might as well believe at once in the poetic fables about love at first sight.

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Exactly; but then arose in his mind the very practical question: Had he not fallen in love at first sight? Was he ever the same after the day when he entered Lady Letitia's drawing-room for the first time and his eyes rested on Camiola Sabine? It is all very well to slight the poetic fable; but how about the personal fact? Why was he now so jealous of poor Georgie Lisle? Why did he think the boy such a presumptuous nuisance? Why were his thoughts always fixed on Camiola and the place where she was staying? Why had Fitzurseham suddenly become a sacred spot for him? Why did he care so little now about anything he used to care for? "If this be not falling in love," he said to himself, somewhat ruefully, "it is a confoundedly good imitation of it; as Mercutio says, 'It will serve.'"

One thing was clear; he must not let this be known, even to his mother. Miss Sabine would no doubt be married to Georgie Lisle, and Romont did not mean to play the absurd part of a hopeless lover where he had really not the slightest right to fall in love. He took it for granted that Camiola was engaged to Georgie Lisle before he ever saw her face, and it would be merely a gratuitous insult to her if he were now to let it be known that he had fallen in love with her. "It is a case of every one dragging his own corpse out," Romont said to himself, adopting a once famous American saying. "I have simply to drag my own corpse out of this, and let no one be any the wiser. I have made a fool of myself, but only of myself, and only I myself am aware of the fact—and only I myself have a right to scold myself, or laugh at myself, or pity myself." He played his part so well that even his mother did not suspect for a moment that anything was the matter with her boy. But she was not over-pleased when he told her that he was going abroad for a short time. She would have wished him to stay with her.

Up to this time Romont had known none of the troubles of life; no, not one. His father died when the younger son was too young a child to feel the loss, and since that time he had seen only happiness and known only affection. He ought, according to all received ideas, to have turned out a very selfish and unworthy person for lack of the adversity which is esteemed necessary to chasten and purify the character. But certain natures have a certain way of taking their own road without regard to axiom; and prosperity had made Romont unselfish, sweet, and sympathetic. His mother had, indeed, as Mrs. Pollen put it, "spoiled him very nicely." She had indulged his Quixotic whimsies, and allowed all that was generous, brave, and self-sacrificing in his nature to grow at its will. Whatever may be said to the contrary, it is certain that there are natures which become their very best in the constant sunlight of happiness, as there are others which, like some grapes, thrive only with the snow on them. A sort of sweet wilfulness, which he got from his mother, lent a semi-poetic, almost feminine qualification to the straightforward manhood of Romont's general character. He always felt for the troubles of others. He had got into the way of regard-

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ing himself as a being happily exempt from trouble of his own, and for that reason free to take constant thought for those who were not so happy. Thus he got out of life all it had to give him, and would have been well content under such conditions to live on for ever. The love which now disturbed and distracted him was his first experience of mental pain.

While he was thus perturbed, longing for something to do and not well knowing what to do, he received a telegram from Mrs. Pollen. It merely asked him to come back to town and see her at once. It told him nothing. It was a relief to him to be asked to do anything at once. He made a hurried explanation to his mother; indeed, it was not much of an explanation, for he could only tell her that he had to go to London—he did not himself know why; and he went off by the next train. The telegram had been dated from Fitzurse House, and he assumed, therefore, that it was at Fitzurse House he was expected. He found Mrs. Pollen alone in her music-room, playing to herself on the organ.

"So kind of you to come at once," she said. "But I knew you would come when I asked you."

"Oh, of course I would come."

"I have just been thinking of something said by Jean Paul Richter about music—I wonder if any one even in Germany reads Jean Paul now? He says that music alone of all the arts can only express what is good. Do you think that is so? Can music not express hate and passion and wild anger?"

"I have not thought the matter over," Romont said with entire gravity. "But I will turn my attention to it if you wish." He understood Mrs. Pollen's ways, and he never thought of pushing her on to an explanation of her reason for asking him to come to London. He could wait. She would tell him when she felt inclined.

"I wish you would think it over; I am much interested in it; and I can't but think that Richter was wrong. Surely one can express the passion of hate as well as the passion of love in music?"

"Perhaps what Richter meant was that one cannot express in music anything that is ignoble and mean. Envy, for instance. How could one get the idea of envy out of the sound of an organ?"

"Well, it is something worth thinking over. I didn't send for you to London to talk about that alone."

"No; I suppose not."

"Camiola Sabine was here last night. She came alone."

"Yes," he answered, with almost perfect composure.

Mrs. Pollen rose from her place at the organ. "Give me your hand; I want to feel your pulse."

He complied. She held his wrist.

"Camiola came to tell me something. She came to tell me that she has promised to marry Georgie Lisle. That will do—it is just as I supposed. Your face is firm enough, my dear boy, but your

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pulse tells its tale." She let his hand drop. "There, you need not explain or protest; I knew it before."

He did not explain or protest. "Well, Mrs. Pollen, if my pulse told you that I was surprised at this, my pulse told you an untrue story. I was not surprised; I was expecting it; I knew it would come; I thought it was something of the kind you had to tell me."

She knew it, then! Mrs. Pollen knew his secret; it was no secret; he had betrayed himself in some way; he could not even have the poor satisfaction of thinking that he had dragged his corpse out, as he had hoped to do!

"Will you do nothing for her? Nothing, nothing?"

"What can I do? What could I do for her? Does she want anything done for her? Does she want my help? Would she have it?"

"Look here, Bertie Romont, and come to the point. Do you love this girl or not? Are you really in love with her?"

"As if you didn't know!" he said passionately. "I *am* in love with her; I would do anything for her; I would give my life to please her; I hate the thought of her marrying *him*; I should hate it even if I knew she loved him and that it would make her happy. See what selfish creatures we are! Ask me if I love her!"

"And yet you will do nothing! You will see her sacrifice herself to that hysterical boy, and you look on with your arms folded and will do nothing! If I were a man, I would rather kill him than see this hideous sacrifice."

"But, great Heaven!" Romont exclaimed, "what is the good of my being in love with her? What right does that give me over her? What right should I have to kill her lover, if these were days for killing off one's rivals? She doesn't care about me."

"You of little faith!" Mrs. Pollen said scornfully. "Have you asked her?"

"No; not likely. Why should I ask her? Hasn't she engaged herself to him! Why, don't you remember; didn't we see her kiss him that night? Didn't that tell us her story?"

"It didn't tell me her story; I learnt it afterwards." Then Mrs. Pollen stopped and pulled herself up. She was on the point of letting out Camiola's secret; but she bethought herself in time. Mrs. Pollen was, above all things, a good "pal;" and, although she had not any great affection for women in general, yet she had a strong feeling of her sex, and she would not tell even Romont what she had found out about Camiola. "Let him find that out for himself," she thought; "he is not worthy of that girl, or of any girl, if he can't do that much." Her manner became instantly more quiet. "Well," she said, "I have my doubts about the whole thing. I can't bring myself to believe that such a girl really is in love with such a man. She might as well dress him in her apparel and make him her waiting-gentlewoman, as Beatrice says——"

"Oh, I think he's a plucky little fellow, so far as that goes."

"I dare say he is—most schoolboys are—but a plucky little

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fellow isn't quite enough for a girl like Camiola Sabine. Well, the point is this—are you, Mr. Romont, disposed to study the matter for yourself, to satisfy your own mind as to whether she is in love with him or not? You will have to lose no time."

"But how can I find out? She is engaged to him. I can't go and ask a girl, 'Do you really want to marry the man you have promised to marry?' It would be an insult."

"Is there no other way?"

"I don't know of any."

"Can't you think of any?"

He shook his head.

"Well," she said impatiently, "I wouldn't for any consideration on earth be as resourceless as a man in a difficulty. Why was not I made a man and a lover? Only I suppose I should be as dull as the rest of you in that case—and you, Bertie Romont, who could put yourself into all sorts of disguises and go through all sorts of dangers for some unfortunate creatures you never knew anything about before, can't think of anything to do to save the girl you love from a fate which, to me, an unconcerned looker-on, seems twenty times worse than death by fever or any other sort of death."

"Do tell me," Romont said perplexedly, "what you mean; what you think I ought to do, what I could do. I am dull; I am stupid; I can't think of anything; I can't even guess what you have in your mind. Pray have pity on my stupidity and tell me."

"Will you put yourself in my hands?"

"I will," he answered doggedly, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

"Absolutely and unconditionally?"

"Absolutely and unconditionally; I know I can trust to anything you say."

"You are right in that, my dear boy. Just let me think for a moment. Don't you find that to strike a few chords on the organ greatly helps one in thinking a thing out—at least, that it gives inspiration sometimes? I do."

She went back to the organ, sat down, and touched the keys. Romont leaned with his back against the chimney-piece and looked at her. He was intensely grateful to her even while much puzzled by her. "Good Heaven, how kind she is!" he thought in a sort of ecstasy of gratefulness for the interest she took in him. "After my mother," he said to himself, "she is the dearest and best friend I have on earth." But he did not say this aloud. Even in the fervour of his gratitude he had a tolerably clear idea that it would not absolutely delight Mrs. Pollen to be classified with his mother. Truly a sincere woman of forty may well take a motherly interest in a young man, and may say so: but it would not be well for him to tell her that he regards her in the light of a mother.

Mrs. Pollen kept on playing for a few moments. Then she suddenly looked round and, with her hand still on the keys, said to him—

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"You have heard me talk of my Albanian servant, Joseph, have you not; the man who was with me, first in Greece, and afterwards in Syria?"

"Yes; I remember your telling me something about him."

"His real name is not Joseph; only the Albanian equivalent for it. I turned it into English, because I don't speak Albanian. He is coming to England."

"Oh, indeed?" Romont did not find himself deeply interested in the movements of Joseph, but he assumed that Mrs. Pollen was merely talking about anything to give herself time to think.

"Yes; I want to get him a place with some one who is travelling, as I don't propose just now to travel myself. He would rather stay with me; but I think he would only stagnate in London. I have a great regard for him; and I want him to do well. I suppose you don't particularly want an Albanian servant?"

"Well, no, Mrs. Pollen. You see, my man has been with me a long time, and we get on very well together, and he knows all my ways; and——"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand; I never, of course, meant to suggest that you should send him away, but I thought that if you were inclined to have another servant——"

"I am afraid I am not rich enough for such a luxury."

"Well, perhaps you could help me to find a place for my Joseph. The worst of it is he can't speak one word of English or understand half a word. He speaks only some dreadfully bad Italian and some almost unintelligible French, or lingo that he calls French. I can do with him because I am used to his jargon. Anyhow, he is coming to London; I expect him to-morrow, and he will stay here until I get him a place or unless I get him a place. He is devoted to me, and I am devoted to him. That reminds me that I must send some one to meet him, for he has never been in London before, and he never could find his way or make a cabman understand him. Would you kindly ring the bell, Mr. Romont?"

He did so, wondering what had become of his love-affair and her plans on his behalf.

A servant made his appearance. "Would you be good enough to ask Mr. Pilgrim kindly to come here for a moment?"

She said nothing to Romont. Romont remained silent as a statue. "Best to let her have her way," he thought.

Christian Pilgrim made his appearance.

"Oh, Mr. Pilgrim, I want you to go to-morrow evening and meet the train from Dover, and look out for an Albanian servant of mine who is coming here. I think I told you of him once or twice?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, he is coming here from Corfu, and he can't speak a word of English. He talks a little bad French; you can speak French, Mr. Pilgrim, can't you?"

"In a sort of way, madame."

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"That will do well enough. Just take hold of him and bring him here. You will have to speak distinctly and slowly—but really it will be almost enough if you mention my name. Just say, 'Madame Pollen,' and he will come with you. I may see you to-morrow; but if I shouldn't be here until late you will remember, won't you?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Look here," Romont said, "can't I do this for you? I am afraid Pilgrim's French is a little too good, too literary, too much got out of books, to be intelligible to our Levantine."

"But you have positively to leave town to-morrow early," Mrs. Pollen said. "How could you manage to do this?"

Romont had not said a word about leaving town early next day. But he took care not to contradict her.

"I am sure I shall not find any difficulty," Pilgrim said. "My French will be quite as bad as his."

"Oh yes, it will be all right," Mrs. Pollen said. "Thank you very much, Mr. Pilgrim."

Mr. Pilgrim bowed and left the room.

"Now," said Mrs. Pollen, turning sharply round to Romont, "you begin to see, don't you?"

"I give you my word, Mrs. Pollen," he replied with the utmost gravity, "that the blind fish in the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky couldn't be more absolutely in the dark than I am. What on earth has this worthy Albanian personage got to do with me and my difficulties? Is he a magician? Is there such a person at all; and why does he come in to interrupt our councils just at this moment?"

Mrs. Pollen laughed a laugh of gratified good-humour.

"I am always delighted," she said, "when I puzzle clever men, and make them look stupid. You look *so* stupid just now."

"I don't believe I look half as stupid as I am."

"Well, I must take pity on your stupidity, as you put it yourself a moment or two ago. I must explain to you." She gave him some explanation, not much. He listened with interest, and sometimes with surprise, occasionally looking curiously into her face, as if not quite certain whether she was altogether in earnest.

"That is enough," she said at last, "for you to know for the present. Further instructions will come hereafter, according as they are wanted. I don't mean to pay out too much cable all at once. You will do this?"

"Oh yes," he said; "certainly. I am pledged to you. I do not quite see as yet——"

"Of course you don't; who ever supposed you would? But you will see in time, always supposing that you open your eyes and do as I tell you; and, for Heaven's sake, don't ask too many questions."

"Just one question at least. Does your Albanian friend dress like one of Byron's Albanians? Does he go kirtled to the knee?"

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"Oh no; he dresses like a sailor—like the sailor of an English yacht. He was a sailor, and he used to wear the uniform of my husband's yacht when he had one; but lately he has just worn the dress of an ordinary sailor."

"All right," Romont said, after a moment's pause, "I'll take charge of him. I am glad to be doing anything. I couldn't endure idleness in my present mood. You are a dear friend, Mrs. Pollen, and whether this hits or misses I shall thank you all the same. I am afraid you are mistaken; but in any case I can't be worse than I am, and I owe you a good turn."

"Mind you throw your whole soul into this," she said.

"As if I wouldn't throw my whole soul into anything which gave me the remotest chance of a glimpse of light in that direction!"

"Come, that's right."

A servant announced a visitor.

"And you leave town to-morrow!" Mrs. Pollen said in a loud voice.

"Yes, I leave town to-morrow. Good evening."

CHAPTER XV.

"MY DAUGHTER—OH, MY DAUGHTER!"

THE stern political economist would hardly, we fear, have approved of all that Mrs. Pollen was doing. Unquestionably the restoration of Fitzurse House and grounds was in great measure undertaken with the object of giving employment to the people of Fitzurseham, those who worked and those who sold; and Mrs. Pollen never troubled herself about the laws of supply and demand. Nor could a very liberal-minded cosmopolitan philanthropist have smiled his cordial approval upon a beneficence narrowed almost exclusively to Fitzurseham. Mrs. Pollen seldom subscribed to any charity which did not belong to the region she patronized. She might be said to have been only a benefactress to Fitzurseham. Her reason for this limitation of her bounty had something to be said for it; "I can't do everything. I am pretty well off in the way of money, but even my money wouldn't run to *that*. So as I happen to be cast down here on the soil of Fitzurseham, I don't see that I can do any better than help the people who are near me. I know something about them; I can see with my own eyes and judge for myself. And then, you know, I am a selfish, egotistic sort of woman; I like being a little queen of society, and I couldn't be that anywhere but in a poor, out-of-the-way sort of place like Fitzurseham. Gratitude? Oh, well, I don't care about gratitude; and I dare say the people here are just as grateful as people anywhere else."

So Mrs. Pollen went her own way; and was probably very happy, for the time at least, in her own way.

Something has been said about Mrs. Pollen's increasing correspondence. It was indeed increasing and multiplying in a manner

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which threatened to become overwhelming. Far remote in condition and sentiment as Fitzurseham was from London society, yet even from out of Fitzurseham itself some rumours managed to make their way into London society about a lady of stately presence, boundless wealth, and unparalleled liberality and charity, and somewhat eccentric ways, who was at once constructing a palace for herself in a swampy suburb and looking after the housing of all the poor for miles around. Paragraphs began to get into the society papers about her; the Lisles, whenever they went to town, were pestered by all their acquaintances for some news of her. Of course the reports immensely exaggerated all Mrs. Pollen's doings. She was indeed very active about the poor of Fitzurseham; if the readers of these pages do not receive full reports of all that she and the Lisles and Romont and Pilgrim had been doing or trying to do in that way, it is only because this narrative is a story merely, and not anything in the nature of the report of a Royal Commission. But if Mrs. Pollen had been Crœsus, Howard the philanthropist, and the whole building firm of Cubitt rolled into one, she could not have accomplished the prodigies of charitable reconstruction which rumour assigned to her. Of course society sought her out, and of course she steadily declined to be found by society. She did not keep a London house. She still occupied the same rooms in a small private hotel in Dover Street, Piccadilly; she made use of a hired carriage; and her retinue of servants consisted of a man and a maid—for we do not as yet reckon among her domestics her Albanian retainer, Joseph. Great ladies called on her and left cards; Mrs. Pollen returned the civility by leaving her card at their doors; and there the matter ended. Enterprising and curious persons went so far out of their way as to visit Fitzurseham, and take a look at the house Mrs. Pollen was reconstructing there, and perhaps even had the good fortune to see her on the lawn. Meanwhile she was becoming the personal acquaintance of every man, woman, and child in Fitzurseham. Two classes of the population she left almost unheeded. Those who were reasonably well off, and those who were hopelessly irreclaimable, her beneficence took little account of. The one class she thought did not want her, and for the other she could do nothing. "I can't do more than give a helping hand," she would say; "and a helping hand is for those who want help and can take it."

But as to the correspondence! It came in from all parts of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It was already beginning to pour in with increasing volume from the United States. Beneficent institutions without number requested Mrs. Pollen's subscriptions and patronage, and proposed to her the taking of shares in unending speculations for the improvement of the condition of the poor. All this, however, was as nothing when compared with the letters from individual men and women. The appeals of associations and corporate bodies of any kind could be answered by subscription or by formal letter, circular fashion, declining and

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setting forth the reason, or setting no reason forth. But the men and women who wrote put forward each a separate and individual case which must either be answered separately or left altogether unanswered. Many, of course, were obviously the appeals of begging-letter impostors and professional mendicants and swindlers. All such were dropped at once into a waste-paper basket. But there were great numbers of letters which were evidently, or at least to all appearance, genuine, and from the very heart of the writer; and these Mrs. Pollen would answer. Many of these were letters from women, simply asking for the advice of a woman. Ingenuous girls confided the whole story of their quarrels with their lovers, and besought Mrs. Pollen to tell them how they ought to go about to make the quarrels up. Wives implored her to tell them what they ought to do with regard to dissipated, or faithless, or drunken husbands. Mothers appealed to her for counsel about their daughters. Legion was the name of the number of girls whom she was implored to reclaim, and earnestly tried to reclaim, from lives of folly leading down to darkness and death. We need not say much about the eccentric letters; the letters setting forth the value of some wonderful invention which she was besought to encourage; the letters admonishing her as to the state of her soul; the letters from men offering her their hand in marriage; the letters from downright maniacs; the letters which asked for nothing more than an autograph, or perhaps an autograph with an accompanying photograph; and also the letters from photographers inviting her to have her likeness taken in cabinet or panel form, to be expanded afterwards into life-size drawings in red chalk.

Many of these letters, it will be seen, had to do exclusively with the concerns of women—their poverty, their efforts to earn a living, their shifts and struggles, their loves and quarrels and sorrows. Mrs. Pollen found that she really could not manage all this correspondence herself, and she would not put it into the hands of any secretary but a woman. Perhaps a great deal of it did not call for answer at all; or might just as well have been answered by a man as by a woman. Perhaps Mrs. Pollen only wanted to find an excuse for giving employment to Vinnie Lammas. But, at all events, she made up her mind that she must have a girl of intelligence and some education to assist her in her correspondence, and that Vinnie Lammas might, if she liked, be that girl. We know the deep designs Mrs. Pollen had long had in her mind concerning poor little Vinnie. Mrs. Pollen was a somewhat self-contradictory person in many ways. She was constantly saying scornful and cynical things about matrimony, and yet she had in her heart a weakness for match-making. To hear her talk sometimes one would have thought that she regarded married life as the most insufferable and absurd condition into which men and women could get; and yet she was now bent on bringing about a marriage between Camiola and Romont; and she had almost made up her mind that the best thing she could do for Pilgrim and Vinnie

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Lammas alike was to turn them into husband and wife as soon as possible. In truth, with all her strength of mind and scorn of weakness, her courage, her unconventionality, and her humour, Mrs. Pollen was a very womanly woman.

She communicated her purpose concerning the employment of Vinnie Lammas to Mr. Pilgrim, and watched him keenly the while. He cordially approved, as indeed he would have approved of anything Mrs. Pollen suggested; and he was delighted on Vinnie's account. But the sort of emotion which Mrs. Pollen expected was not in him. He was not in love with Vinnie Lammas clearly—not as yet. Was there some one else? Very likely. Mrs. Pollen was not blind to the half-distracted manner which poor Pilgrim fell into for a while after his unfortunate outburst of love to Camiola. She knew that something had happened which was a load upon his mind—a distress and a shame to him.

"What do you think of my Albanian, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Think of him, madame?"

"Yes, Mr. Pilgrim; 'twas my word."

"I don't know what to say, madame."

"Very well; don't say anything, then. I quite understand you. I dare say you have a theory about my Albanian——"

Pilgrim smiled.

"Yes; no doubt. You would come to know, of course, in time. Only let it be a theory for the present; and take it for granted that there is an honest and reasonable purpose in everything my Albanian and I may do."

"As if I could possibly doubt that, madame!" If Mrs. Pollen had told him that she had a particular desire that he should fling himself into the Thames, Christian Pilgrim would have assumed without any question that she had an honest and reasonable purpose in telling him so.

"My Albanian and I are much concerned just now about the happiness of two young people, Mr. Pilgrim."

This was a sentence spoken with a double purpose.

"I—I thought as much, madame."

He had great difficulty in saying these few words. He gasped and stammered and kept his eyes away from hers; looked down, looked round; looked anywhere but in the direction of her eyes. She remained purposely silent, and kept her look fixed on him, and she saw his uneasiness. She knew all now. "Poor, absurd fellow!" she said to herself. "Poor, heavy old moth—would nothing serve it but to singe its wings at the flame of that brilliant candle?" A certain amount of contempt was mingled in her pity for him.

"Oh! another thing I wanted to talk to you about, Mr. Pilgrim. You once lived in Sheffield, did you not?"

"Yes, madame." This was a painful subject; it brought back the memory of his unhappy married life.

"Now let me ask you another question or two. Don't think I

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mean to put you to any needless pain; but you will soon see what my reason is, and you will not find fault with it."

Pilgrim bent his head and remained silent.

"I want to ask you two questions. Was your wife's maiden name Eccles, and had she an elder sister?"

"Her name was Eccles, madame, and she had an elder sister, whom I never saw."

"Do you know whether that elder sister ever had a daughter?"

"I never, madame, asked or was told anything about her—there was nothing very pleasant to be learned, I fear."

"Well, I believe that she had a daughter; and that that daughter is the girl about whom poor old Jethro Merridew went half-mad. I believe she is Jethro Merridew's daughter, and that she is still alive somewhere; and I want you to help me in finding her, if we can. I don't ask you to do this because she is your niece—and I fully believe she is, and I will tell you presently why I believe it—but because there is a chance of your being able to do some good, and because I think by doing so you will brighten and make bearable some of the sadder memories of your own life, and dismiss into the darkness some of those shadows and phantoms that haunt you now; some of them bright phantoms perhaps, as well as dark and grey, but phantoms all the same, and misleading and distracting."

Pilgrim shook his head in melancholy assent.

"Come, I am your friend and you know it. I will tell you how I found out all this, and how I found out something that concerns myself too. I begin to be pretty sure that I have a relative living; relative by marriage, that is to say, as well as you, about whom I knew nothing a few months ago. I hope he is likely to do me some credit, but I am not by any means quite certain on that point."

Then Mrs. Pollen explained fully to Pilgrim what she had found out, or believed herself to have found out, and how she had got at it. "I have given him something to think over," she said in her own mind—"something *else*."

Always dealing with Merridew and talking with him as if he were a thoroughly sane and sensible man, Mrs. Pollen had won him into a confidence and a quietude which allowed him the full use of such sanity as he possessed. She soon became convinced that he was, indeed, sound and shrewd enough on every point but the strange disappearance of his daughter and her certain return, glorified into a fine lady. It was quite clear to Mrs. Pollen that poor Jethro once had a daughter, and that on some one eventful occasion she had left him, and had afterwards written to him and told him that she would return one day a lady. In all this there was nothing surprising. The girl might well have been enticed away by some admirer, who promised that he would marry her and bring her back in honour and splendour to her father's house. It was, unfortunately, only too probable that such a promise would not have been kept; and so the girl would not come back to her home

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Little by little Mrs. Pollen got at the whole reality of Merridew's story. He had been married; his wife was a Sheffield woman, her maiden name was Eccles; she had left him—had run away from him, leaving their one little daughter behind. For this one little daughter Merridew lived, worked, pinched, starved. He would never bring her into Fitzurseham whither he had migrated or drifted after his wife left him. He had kept the girl at a good school, where she was taught French and music and other such ladylike accomplishments. The whole soul of the poor man was set on making a lady of his child. While she was still at the school she ran away; he did not know whether alone or in companionship; only that she had gone.

Merridew's mental condition resembled the physical condition of one who is suddenly struck blind or deaf by some shock. Up to a certain day, hour, and minute he is in full possession of all his senses and faculties; from that instant forth he is robbed of some of them for ever. This was mentally Merridew's case. Up to the time when his daughter left him all was clear; with her disappearance his confusion began. Now that he had become confidential with Mrs. Pollen he could tell her the whole story of his life, with its every incident, up to the moment when he got the letter from his daughter telling him of her flight; from that moment he could tell nothing clearly—nothing, that is to say, that had to do with his daughter's story. On every other subject he was shrewd and sharp; on that subject all was confusion. He could not tell of any steps he had taken to find the girl; he could not remember whether he had taken any steps. He could not give any reason for his belief that she would certainly come back; he only grew angry and looked puzzled if any question of the kind were pressed upon him. His conviction was, to Mrs. Pollen's thinking, simply a part of his mental disorder, to be traced back to the shock of his daughter's disappearance. He loved to tell his story over and over again, enriched with many quotations from the poets, to his benefactress, "the lady of the land," as he now called Mrs. Pollen. She listened again and again, always hoping for some hint or word which might supply a missing link in the narrative, and put her in the way of making some quest for the lost daughter.

The girl had written him a letter, in which she avowed, apparently with all the wild sincerity of passionate affection and grief, that she would come back to him a lady. There, it seemed to Mrs. Pollen, was the point at which his mind became shaken. He took his daughter's promise as something like the word of a prophet. Life had nothing in which he believed with so profound a conviction as the certainty of her glorified return. He was educating himself for this; he was giving himself airs in advance on the strength of the position he was to be called to occupy; he became the butt of the neighbours for his crazy vanity. Mrs. Pollen was easily able to verify much of the story. An application to the school settled part of it. Poor Merridew brought her his

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daughter's letter, and gave it to her to read. None but he had ever read it before. But Mrs. Pollen could not succeed in finding any further trace of the girl. Several years had passed, and Merridew's daughter, if she were living, would not be particularly young any longer. It may have been, perhaps, only the most ordinary version of a commonplace old story. A giddy girl, the daughter of a very giddy mother, disappeared below the surface of society, and did not reappear. There would be nothing very amazing in that. Mrs. Pollen, however, did not put that view of the matter to Merridew. On the contrary, she felt convinced that the best tie he had on life, the only thing that made life endurable to him, was this happy delusion about the sure return of his daughter. Mrs. Pollen tried her best to believe it herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ALL TO OURSELVES."

"AND we shall have a happy day, all to ourselves—mind, all to ourselves."

These were the words in which Camiola accepted, with sparkling eyes, the invitation of Mrs. Pollen to come over to Fitzurse House and spend a whole day there looking at the progress of the work, giving ideas about the decorations of the rooms, and the arrangement of the grounds, and so forth. Camiola made this her condition, that they were to have a happy day to themselves. It is not for this that a young lady with a devoted lover usually makes a bargain. She does not as a rule suggest a stipulation which implies that the lover is not to be allowed to come near her for a whole day. But Mrs. Pollen quite understood the girl, and was anxious that she should have her wish. It would be a relief to Camiola to have a day altogether free from the occupations, the emotions, and the attentions of the rectory now. There were times when Camiola dreaded even the kindly eyes of Lady Letitia. They looked doubtingly, suspiciously, at her sometimes—those kindly eyes. Lady Letitia evidently had an uneasy doubt, even still, about Camiola's willingness to marry Georgie. She dreaded lest the girl should be making a mere sacrifice to friendship, which she would one day regret. This troubled Lady Letitia all the more because she could not at the bottom of her heart feel quite satisfied as to her own conduct. Camiola saw all this, and was glad to be away, for a few free hours even, alone with Mrs. Pollen.

Lady Letitia, for her part, was glad that Camiola was to be out of the way for some hours. She had determined to have a full explanation with Janette concerning Walter Fitzurse, and she thought she could manage better with Janette if they, too, were alone, for it was as likely as not that Camiola might side with Janette out of some romantic sympathy with young love and all that sort of thing; and Janette would perhaps feel strengthened up to the point

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of actual defiance. Poor Lady Letitia did not by any means like the prospect of what she feared would be a conflict. Janette was, in her way, as headstrong as Georgie, and strength of will is a very different thing indeed from strength of intellect.

Meanwhile Camiola found a welcome reception at Fitzurse House. She had made use of her key, and let herself into the music-room without ring of bell or summons of servant. She did not see Mr. Pilgrim anywhere, and was delighted. She did not know that Mrs. Pollen had purposely found an occasion for sending him out of the way.

"Come, let me look at you," Mrs. Pollen said. "Come over here, in the full sunlight; I want to see exactly what you are looking like now. Yes, I thought so. You are getting paler and paler every day. What is the matter with you, child?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Pollen; nothing, indeed."

"That 'nothing' appears to be a very active influence for harm with some people, I find."

"It doesn't do me any harm; I am perfectly well. Wait until luncheon, and you will see."

"Is Georgie going back to Egypt?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"Before you are married?"

"Yes. I think he ought to go. I think he ought to see the campaign out. I am not fond of soldiering, Mrs. Pollen. I believe I am unlike most girls in that. I don't like any wars but wars of defence. I don't like wars of policy, as they are called, I believe, and I don't think if I were a man I could be got to bear a hand in anything of the kind. Still, I know that these are not Georgie's ideas, nor the ideas of his father and mother. And as he is gone in for soldiering, I don't think he ought to draw out until this campaign is over. I am afraid I couldn't much admire a man who did that."

"Did he wish to do it?"

"Oh no; not at all. He has plenty of spirit and courage, in that way. He is very anxious to get well and get back; but he wanted me to marry him first. He wanted to have a Mrs. George Lisle as the girl he left behind him."

"And the girl wouldn't?"

"No, I wouldn't. When he comes back it will be time enough."

Some people, if they had heard Camiola talking in this cool, firm way, might have supposed that she wanted heart, or wanted delicacy of feeling. Mrs. Pollen, of course, did not suppose anything of the kind. She could see quite clearly the effort it cost Camiola to speak of the matter at all; she could understand the modest and womanly resolve that if Camiola had to confide anything about her own position and her own feelings to another woman, she must leave no doubt as to that position and those feelings. Mrs. Pollen admired the girl greatly, even when she was angry with her. She could not but admire the sacrifice Camiola was making, even

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though she was angry with her for making such a sacrifice. She suddenly turned to another subject. Speaking as if quite casually, but with a very distinct purpose in her mind, she said—

"*He* has a theory against war too."

She fixed her eyes steadfastly on Camiola's face. Camiola coloured slightly and looked down. Would she look up with real or assumed ignorance and ask, "Who has a theory?" No; she only said in a very low voice—

"Yes; I know."

This was enough for Mrs. Pollen. The "he" was Albert Romont, of course. He was then just as much in Camiola's mind as ever. Albert Romont was still "he" to her. He was still her ideal hero; it was with a certain tenderness and pride that she admitted her knowledge of his views and the fact that they were like her own.

"That is the reason he never went into the army," Mrs. Pollen said; "although he loves adventure, and he has risked his life ever so much more than the ordinary soldier does. He has been on battle-fields, he told me; he has worn the Geneva Cross and looked after the wounded. But he says he couldn't bear a hand in any war but a defensive war. I told him I thought his opinions on that subject were rubbish, and that man's first business in life was to fight with his brother-man and kill him. He only laughed and said I liked talking paradoxes. But really, Camiola, I am inclined to think that as things go most of our brother-men would be much better dead than alive, and that it is quite an act of philanthropy to kill them. I don't think I succeeded in convincing or converting him."

"No, you couldn't convert him," Camiola said.

"He only replied that there was always sure to be some woman sorry for every fellow who was killed. How odd that your ideas and his should be so much alike!"

"I had always those ideas," Camiola said quietly, "as long as I can remember. Perhaps they came of my not having been born in good society. Doesn't Kinglake say that no English lady would stand having her boys taught the doctrines of the Peace Society?"

"I don't know, dear, but *his* mother is an English lady; and he seems to have got hold of some of the doctrines of the Peace Society from some one. Strange that you should come to be a soldier's wife with such views, Camiola."

"Oh, well, I can hardly pretend to call them views; they are sentiments rather, or feelings. And after all I don't intend to be a soldier's wife, Mrs. Pollen."

"You mean to disarm our youthful and slender Mars?"

"I hope Georgie will give up soldiering after this campaign, and settle down to a quiet life."

"Get into Parliament, and that sort of thing?"

"I don't know about that; but I hope he will do something, and not be a mere idler; I couldn't have any respect for a man who was a mere idler."

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Later on Mrs. Pollen suddenly said—

"We are going to have a row on the river, Camiola; you and I. My Albanian, Joseph, will row us. You have not seen my Albanian yet?"

"No; I am very anxious to see him; I never saw an Albanian; I am not quite sure that I know exactly what an Albanian is—a sort of Greek, is he not?"

"Well, yes; a sort of Greek. We are to drive a few miles. The river here is not streamlike enough for my taste; too many buildings and barges. Joseph is to meet us with the boat a few miles farther up."

"That will be so delightful."

They had a pleasant drive through leafy roads, the summer still hardly waning. At length the carriage turned down a quiet green lane, a lane that had English landscape in every turf and blade and flower, and they came on the river and saw a small boat rocking on the sunny water, and Joseph with a pair of sculls in hand awaiting them on the bank. Joseph wore a full beard and moustache of jet black, and had heavy black eyebrows and a skin nearly as sallow-brown as that of a North African. He was dressed much like an English sailor. Mrs. Pollen gave him a few directions in Italian—a sort of Levantine Italian—in acceptance of which he merely bowed. He helped the ladies into the little boat with the grave dignity of a Red Indian. When they were seated in the stern he shoved off into mid-stream.

"I cannot tell how or why it is," Camiola said in a low tone, "but I feel strangely when I look at your Albanian. There is something about him which affects me in a way I can't explain. He seems as if he were a part of some past chapter of my life. I wonder can I have lived in his country and have been an Albanian during some pre-existence, and seen him and known him? What is the matter with me, dear Mrs. Pollen? I wish I could see Albania."

"You must travel. You have not travelled much yet?"

"No, hardly anywhere. We are to travel, I believe."

"We?"

"Georgie and I, after we are married. I dare say I shall enjoy it very much."

Camiola had taken off her glove and was trailing her hand in the water and watching the ripples. Her tone and manner did not carry with them much promise of enjoyment.

"I have travelled a great deal," Mrs. Pollen said. "I don't know that it has done me any particular good or given me much instruction."

"But your memory must be such a treasure-house of beautiful pictures and associations. You interest me much, Mrs. Pollen."

"Do I, dear? I am glad if I can be interesting to any one, but especially to you. I don't interest myself, not one little bit; but then, you see, I know all my own story."

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"I should like to know it," Camiola said, with a simple openness. "I know you have a story."

"Nothing new, my dear; only the poor common story of a wasted life—though, by the way, it might have a moral and a lesson for you, if one human being ever took a lesson from the fate and the follies and the sufferings of another. But human beings don't take any such lessons, and I have long given up the notion of guiding or warning any one. At least I have got out of the way of hoping anything from it; I am afraid I do try to warn you sometimes."

"I should like to hear the lesson of your life for me—it might do me good; I don't think I am *very* perverse."

"My life was wasted just because I was weak and unwise enough to marry a man I didn't love; that's the whole story. Take care, Camiola, that you do not commit the same act of folly—worse than folly. That's all."

Camiola said nothing. To argue the question would be useless, she thought.

"How delicious this air is," she said, "and this river, and those bewitching trees! Suppose we now go close in under those trees."

Mrs. Pollen said some words to her Albanian, and he brought them with a few rapid strokes of his sculls close to the bank, and under the bending branches of some trees that hung over the stream. They were now in a lonely little creek, out of sight and sound of other boats.

"Oh, this day and this place make me feel happy again, and so young, ever so young!" Camiola exclaimed, in a little burst of gladsome enthusiasm.

"Fancy, at your age, talking of feeling happy again and young!" Mrs. Pollen said. "You not happy; not always happy! You who have youth, and beauty, and fortune, and a lover who adores you and——"

"Oh, I wish he didn't adore me," Camiola said, half in laughter, half in tears; "it is so dreadful to be adored. I don't want to be adored; I was never made for adoration; I am only a commonplace girl; I hate to see a man grovelling at my feet. There, I wish I hadn't said all that; it was wrong of me; it was cruel to—to him, of course, if I had really meant it, but I didn't. It was your words that drew it out of me, Mrs. Pollen; and indeed I believe you have set your heart on making me reveal my whole soul and all its secrets to you. I was going to say a rude thing, such a dreadful thing, and yet I was not thinking of being rude—the very contrary. I was thinking only of an expression of confidence in you, and affection."

"I know what you were going to say very well, and I am delighted with it, and I echo it; and indeed, I think I said much the same thing before."

"Then you do know?" Camiola asked, with a faint colour on her cheeks; "and you are not offended?"

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"Of course I know, and I am very much delighted. You were going to say that you wished I were your mother."

"Yes; but it was absurd, for you are ever so much too young."

"So far as years go, I might have been your mother long ago; and I wish I were. But I can tell you, child, that if I were I would stand no nonsense on that marriage question. You would have to go to bed without supper if I heard any more of that."

"I am very fond of Lady Letitia, too," Camiola said with simplicity, as if she felt bound to make some acknowledgment to the absent Lady Letitia.

"Yes, of course you are. But just at present it is a sort of relief to you to be away from her now and then. In your secret heart you think she might have stood by you a little more; and you resent it."

"Oh no Mrs. Pollen; I do not, indeed."

"Yes, you do," Mrs. Pollen said decisively. "You don't admit it to yourself, or you will not admit it, but the feeling is there all the same; I can read that much of your heart."

Camiola tried to disclaim any such feeling, but the more she tried the harder it became. The more she admitted question of the matter at all the more it grew upon her that in her secret heart there was a feeling of disappointment and pain with regard to Lady Letitia. Mrs. Pollen had read her heart indeed.

"Are you a witch?" she asked, with a half-melancholy smile; "are there no secrets from you?"

"None that you could keep, my dear. Yours is a very transparent soul, and I have an interest in studying it." Mrs. Pollen made a sign and they pushed out into the stream again.

"Your Albanian rows very much like an Englishman," Camiola said; "I did not suppose that Greeks of any kind rowed like that."

"My good English girl, pray do not fancy that there are no sailors in the world but those of Wapping Old Stairs and Portsmouth Hard. The Greeks of the islands are born seamen. This man is not a Greek, however, and he has been a great deal with Englishmen."

"How silent and statue-like he is! He reminds me of the man of metal in the 'Arabian Nights' who rowed one of the Calendars, the sons of kings, and suddenly sank when the name of God was reverently spoken. Do you think your mysterious man would sink if I were to breathe that name?"

"No, Camiola; he is a Christian like ourselves; and he is not made of metal; though I don't say that he may not be enchanted."

"Indeed? How delightful! But how?"

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Pollen answered carelessly. "He looked at you, I fancied, as if he were enchanted; but I don't suppose he could well help doing that, seeing that he has eyes."

"I think he is handsome," Camiola said, not heeding Mrs. Pollen's words; "and yet I don't know. He perplexes me with

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some distracting dim idea of having seen him before. Do you know, Mrs. Pollen, I think I am in a sort of silly humour to-day? I feel somehow like a released school-girl—I don't know why."

"Don't you? I do."

"Oh no. Why, then?"

"Because you are a released school-girl—or released girl at all events."

Another touch at the wounded place. Camiola threw a beseeching look at Mrs. Pollen.

"How can I go on teasing you in this way, you were going to ask? Only for your good, my dear. I want to make you familiar with your real self and your real feelings."

"My dear kind friend, pray, pray don't misunderstand me. You may see too much or see in dreadfully exaggerated proportions. I know what I am doing quite well; I have misgivings every now and then; but I think I should have them in any case. I fancy most girls must have some little touches of misgiving at such a time under the very happiest conditions, and I don't think I am naturally a marrying girl. I think I could be very happy living my own free life with my friends. But I don't think I feel any misgivings on account of *him*—of Georgie. I think I can make him happy, and I don't see why I should not be quite happy too in the end. Now that is really how I feel, and I want you not to misunderstand me; with all your mysterious insight and reading of hearts, I think you do misunderstand me sometimes."

"Very good," said Mrs. Pollen; "we shall see. Meanwhile I take account of your protest, Camiola; I make a note of it, as I believe they say in the courts of law."

They had a delightful time of it on the river. Camiola had not been so happy for many a day. It seemed to her a season of relief and of rescue. She was really tired almost out of all patience of being adored. She was weary of hearing her own praises eternally chanted in a somewhat minor key; of listening to words of passionate ecstasy in unending iteration. "I love you, I love you, I adore you," such was the weary burden of the song that was always sounding in her ears. She could not even resent it; she had to endure it. She could only encourage herself with the sad sick hope that it would not last for ever. To this it had already come! Camiola looked out in hope and with positive yearning to a time in their impending married life when poor dear Georgie would not be quite so much in love with her; when his passion should have cooled and quieted down; when he would regard her with a less lover-like and ecstatic admiration; when he would take her for granted, and not weary himself and her any more with protestations of his devotion, his gratitude, and his happiness. "Then we can talk to each other like rational human creatures," she thought to herself; "we shall be like an ordinary man and woman; I shall hear no more about my own perfections—those sickening perfections—and I shall like him ever so much, and be very happy with him.

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Perhaps he will come not to care for me at all in the end; but even that will be much better."

This was the mood, these were the hopes, in which our poor rich girl was contemplating her approaching marriage. No wonder that she found it a relief to spend some hours alone with Mrs. Pollen. Mrs. Pollen was, she believed, the only living creature who understood her and sympathized with her. The only disadvantage she found was that Mrs. Pollen understood her rather too well, and was in the habit of suddenly holding up a lamp by means of which Camiola was able for the first time to read clearly the innermost secret of her own heart. Yet even that, while it startled her, also gave her a sense of sympathy, and made her feel that she was not alone. She clung to Mrs. Pollen with a closeness and tenderness that touched the elder woman beyond expression.

After a while they landed again, and got into the carriage to go home. The Albanian mounted the box with the coachman. Mrs. Pollen did not say much as they were driving home, but whatever she did say harped on the one string. It had always something to do with Camiola's engagement to Georgie Lisle. Camiola's nerves had by this time become a little unstrung, which was exactly what Mrs. Pollen wished them to be. Isabel Pollen had to perform an experiment in heart-surgery which she firmly believed was needed for the preservation and the welfare of her all-unconscious young patient, and the patient had to be brought to a certain condition of nervousness before the remedy could effectively be tried.

As they were entering the house Mrs. Pollen said a few words to Joseph in the sort of Italian which he understood, telling him that she would ring for him presently, and would have a letter for him to take. The two women entered the music-room. Just then it was flooded by the amber fire of the descending sun.

Mrs. Pollen had taken her seat at the organ, and was playing a few soft sonorous chords. Camiola stood near.

"How beautiful this room is!" Camiola said. "You have made everything beautiful here. How sorry I am the day is nearly over! I have enjoyed it so much."

"Come again to-morrow."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Camiola said hastily.

"Your lover couldn't do without you, I suppose?"

"I suppose not. I don't know." She took up a book and began to turn over its leaves.

"Tell me, Camiola, has he ever kissed you?"

"Never; oh, indeed, never."

"Nor even tried to?"

"No."

Camiola did not add that she had never since their engagement been one moment alone with her lover.

"I give you my word, Camiola, I wouldn't have such a lover as that for all the world."

"But, dear Mrs. Pollen, you don't understand; you don't do

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him justice"—and Camiola could not help laughing at her own defence of her lover. "He knows I would not like it; he falls in with my humour; he is a very chivalrous boy; he is *indeed*. I am afraid he knows only too well that I don't really love him—in that sort of way; and he is willing to take me as I am, but he would not do anything that I didn't like."

"Except marry you," Mrs. Pollen said scornfully.

"Yes, but I am willing to marry him; quite willing. It was I who made the advance; at last, I mean. He had dropped the thing altogether, he was not saying anything more about it; but I told Lady Letitia that I would marry him if he liked."

"Nice unselfish boy," Mrs. Pollen murmured.

"But indeed he is unselfish; he was prepared to let me do as I pleased; he didn't mean to press me any more, and I am very much attached to him, and I am sure I shall come to love him in the end. I am growing quite tender to him already. And then they are all so fond of me. Lady Letitia seems so happy. Mrs. Pollen, you are the last woman in the world who could pretend not to understand what a happy thing it is to make other people happy —you who live for nothing else; you who have no pleasure at all of your own that I can see, and who only enjoy doing something for everybody and anybody else. Fancy your not understanding why I should like to make Lady Letitia and Georgie and all of them happy."

Mrs. Pollen got up and rang the bell twice. That was her summons to her Albanian. She went on talking.

"Camiola, it always seems to me that you don't take this matter seriously enough. What do I sacrifice by indulging my whims—for they are only whims and nothing more? A little money—which I don't want, and shouldn't know what to do with in any other way. Now, what are you going to sacrifice? Your life—your whole life —your love; your inner sense of what is right. Remember that you have a heart, and a warm heart. Have you thought of what the condition of that heart would be if anything were to happen?"

Joseph had entered the room, and was standing mute as an image awaiting Mrs. Pollen's commands. Mrs. Pollen had a letter in her hand which she was about to give him.

"Have you thought of what your feelings would be if before your marriage, or after it, you were to meet—yes, I will put it plainly—if you were to meet Mr. Romont again?"

Camiola was so startled by this sudden question that the book she was holding dropped from her hands to the ground. Her face crimsoned; her hands trembled; she tried to speak, and could not find utterance. The terror long present in a vague and shadowy way, and in some remote corner of her mind, was made by Mrs. Pollen's words to come out into the light and assume the shape of a menacing apparition. Poor Camiola's nerves, as we have seen, were all unstrung. She had been listening with a strange feeling of morbid pleasure and morbid pain to all that Mrs. Pollen had

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been saying about her engagement, and everything that had been said was made to lead up to this final stroke, now given so suddenly and so keenly that it seemed to set all her heart's blood flowing at once. There was a moment's struggle, and then Camiola broke down utterly. Pride, shame, and all gave way. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

The Albanian made a sudden movement as if he were about to go to her; then he turned and abruptly left the room.

Mrs. Pollen put her arms tenderly round Camiola.

"There, there, my dear; perhaps I ought not to have touched you quite so sharply. But you understand yourself and everything else better now, don't you? You will soon see your way."

Camiola began to recover herself.

"Oh, Mrs. Pollen," she sobbed out, "you have played upon my heart as on the keys of your organ."

"I have brought out sweet, true, and tender notes from it, my dear," Mrs. Pollen answered; "the music of your future, believe me."

Mrs. Pollen was indeed well content with the result of her experiment in playing on the keys of Camiola's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BUT THERE REMAINS A SCRUPLE."

CAMIOLA had gone home. Mrs. Pollen returned to her music-room, and, according to her custom when alone there, was playing on her organ. She was delighted at the result of her experiment thus far. She thought she had brought Camiola to a point from which the girl could not draw back. How the engagement with Georgie Lisle was to be got rid of Mrs. Pollen did not know, and did not much care; but she was determined that it must be got rid of one way or another. Her interest was all in Camiola and Romont; she had the poorest opinion of Georgie, and was not in the slightest degree concerned about his feelings. With full recognition of Mrs. Pollen's many generous and some noble qualities, we cannot profess to believe that she was rigidly scrupulous as to means when once she had convinced herself that her ends were all right.

The music-room was but faintly lighted as yet. The twilight had not wholly faded from the skies, which could be seen through the still uncurtained windows. Mrs. Pollen, absorbed in her music, did not hear the door open or see her Albanian come in. She started when she heard his voice in the dim light. The voice spoke in remarkably good English this time, although with much emotion.

"Is she gone?"

The voice, we need hardly tell any reader, was the voice of Albert Romont, although the complexion was still the complexion of Albanian Joseph.

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"Well?" Mrs. Pollen asked exultingly. She had risen from her seat at the organ, and was coming towards him with both hands held out. "Are you satisfied now? Was I right? Do you begin to see your way at last?"

"Look here," Romont said passionately, "I can't have anything more to do with this. It seems a dreadful thing—we two to find out all about this girl's feelings—it's like acting the part of a spy. I won't play at this game any more."

"Isn't that being a little too scrupulous? Have you not a right to know how the girl feels to you? Have you not a right to save her from a fate worse a thousand times than death to a girl with such a heart and brains and soul? Death? Why, what is death to any woman with spirit enough to make her worthy to live?"

"Still I can't do it any more; I feel as if I were doing something which would wound her to the heart if she came to know."

"What about the wound to her heart when she is married to that young man and finds she has to live a long life with him, tied to him, chained to him, and knows she never, never can love him? What about her heart then? Stuff and nonsense! Bertie Romont, you talk like a child. If I were you I would carry her off by force rather than let her sacrifice herself to him. Yes, I would; and more than that, I would kill her—I would indeed—kill her with my own hand rather than let her give herself up to him; and I should feel certain that I had done a good and a righteous deed. Oh, you men, what spiritless creatures you are!"

"But I so love her," he pleaded, "I so adore her. I hate the thought of hurting her feelings. Every moment I see her or listen to her I only love and adore her all the more. You don't understand, and you couldn't understand how I feel. There is a sort of terror in my love; I am so afraid of offending her. You see, a woman can't feel to a woman as a man does. You can't have any of the sort of goddess notion about any woman, but men can—I can. I feel to her sometimes as if she were a sort of divinity."

"All right," said Mrs. Pollen coolly, "I am very glad. I don't think any the worse of a young man because he is a little crazy about a girl. The fault I find with *you* is that you are not half crazy enough. But anyhow, my very sensitive and scrupulous young man, don't your scruples come rather late? There is nothing more to find out, is there? You cannot pretend to have any doubt on your mind as to the state of her feelings now?"

"Oh no, I can't have any doubt now. If I had only known, or thought, or guessed before! But what is the use now?"

"There was no watching or spying needful on my part," Mrs. Pollen said; "I knew it all before. I suspected it from the beginning. I knew it just as soon as she did; the very same moment that told it to her told it to me. Later on she told it to me herself."

"Told it to you herself?"

"Yes; I gave her to understand that I had found out her secret,

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and then she told me that I was right. She has been in love with you this long time, but not so long as you have been in love with her."

Romont looked at her with quick surprise. "How do you know that?" he asked.

"How do I know anything? Because I use my eyes and my senses. You were in love with her the very first day you saw her. The moment I saw how your eyes rested on her, even when you did not yet know who she was, I felt sure that you had found your fate, in the matter of love-making at least—so far as that sort of work makes up a man's fate. I tried you with one or two questions as we were driving away—as we passed Georgie Lisle on the bridge, and even before we saw him; and your answers made me quite certain that I was right. I dare say you didn't know it yourself then; but I did. I didn't find her out until the night we saw her stooping over him and kissing him."

"But surely that ought to have made you think she was in love with *him*? It made me think so; it made me sure of it. I made up my mind to leave England at the first possible moment—after that."

"Men are so dull in these affairs. As if a girl kissing a young fellow whom she had known like a brother—a young fellow wounded, who had just fallen in a faint under her very eyes—as if her kissing him was any proof of her being in love with him!"

"Well, but anyhow it surely wasn't any proof of her being in love with me?"

Mrs. Pollen smiled. "Directly, no; indirectly, yes, yes! The moment she saw you your name came out in a cry from her lips. I saw the way she looked at you and to you and then away from you; I saw that for the moment she was only thinking that you must have seen her kiss him, and then I knew; I told her so that very night."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, my dear kind and mysteriously gifted Mrs. Pollen, why on earth did you not tell me?"

"My dear kind and by no means mysteriously gifted, but on the contrary remarkably dull and stupid, Mr. Romont, why should I have told you anything at all about it?"

"Since you professed to be my friend and her friend," he said gravely; "since you are so anxious now to save her and me from a life of wretched and cruel mistake——"

"I don't know that I had professed any great friendship for either of you at that time; although I did like you both; but in any case how was I to suppose that a young man who appeared to have plenty of spirit, and had done all sorts of plucky things for people he never spoke to, would venture nothing to find out whether the girl he was in love with was in love with him? How was I to suppose that you would quietly let the matter drop? How was I to suppose that she would never make the slightest use of her eyes to encourage you? If I were she I would have contrived

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with one little quiet half-glance that her mother, if she were living, might have seen and failed to understand—I would have contrived to make you understand that you were welcome to say something to me. No, though; I am not so sure about that. I doubt, after what has happened, whether I could have made *you* understand; but I would have tried."

"Oh, but she wouldn't; she couldn't do anything like that," he said hastily.

"Thank you very much; such a nice graceful compliment to me! She couldn't do such a dreadful thing; no, of course not; but I could."

"I didn't mean that."

"Well, no matter; I forgive you. I quite admit that there are things I would do and your divinity would not do. But to come back to the point. How was I to suppose that you would have acted so absurdly as you did, both of you? Of course, I wasn't going to betray the girl's secret to you, or to any man alive."

"But you have done it all the same."

"Well, I put you in the way of finding it out, certainly. But I wasn't going to say to you—Dear, good, generous young man, take pity on this young woman who has fallen in love with you, and if you are really in love with her, prythee be kind enough to tell her so."

"Well, we have muddled it among us."

"Excuse me; *we* have not muddled anything; at least, I have not muddled it. You and she may have done a good deal of muddling between you; but I have not. I have done my best to counteract the effects of your muddling, and will still do it."

"What would you have me to do now?"

"Go to her, go to her at once, this minute; and tell her all. Tell her that you are in love with her, and that you know she is in love with you."

"And she will say I am too late; she will say she is pledged, and promised, and engaged, and all the rest of it, to this confounded Lisle."

"Tell her she must break it off. Tell her she shall not marry him. Don't hesitate, or allow her to think for a moment that you would hesitate. Prevent her from making herself unhappy just as you would prevent her from throwing herself out of the window. I suppose if you saw her going to throw herself out of the window you would not scruple about putting your arms round her waist to hold her back? Take my word for it, you would do a much kinder thing to a girl like Camiola if you were to let her throw herself out of the window than if you were to allow her to marry Georgie Lisle."

"We don't live in the days of young Lochinvar, Mrs. Pollen," he said; "I wish to Heaven we did. I wish I might take her up on my saddle and gallop off with her. But I am afraid Camiola," he felt his cheek grow hot as he spoke out her name in this way,

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"is not the sort of girl to stand being carried off in that kind of way. And then, don't you know, I am very much inclined to believe that she will think I have played her a shabby trick by getting her secret out of her in this way—this absurd disguise. I didn't think of it before in that light, but now it does seem to me an awfully mean thing to have done."

"There!" said Mrs. Pollen. "I might have expected this. I put you in the way of knowing for certain that the girl you love loves you; and my thanks is to be told that I have done a mean trick, which a woman of better bringing up would despise. I wonder any woman ever goes into any sort of enterprise with a man. Why, you pitiful creatures don't seem to understand even the principle of honour among thieves! Since Eve was fool enough to try to please her shabby husband, things were always just like that. Very good, Mr. Romont; I have my reward. Settle the matter for yourself."

"No, no; don't be angry with me," he pleaded. "I didn't mean that or anything like that—but what was only kind and friendly of you to suggest for both our sakes, hers and mine, may not have been quite right for me to do. You see, she's not a woman of the world."

"Well, well," Mrs. Pollen said impatiently, cutting him off in his explanation, "never mind about all that. I don't care whether you include me in your vote of censure or leave me out of it. I am quite willing to admit that both you and she are far too lofty in your natures and too refined in your scruples for this rough world altogether; and I don't feel myself by any means at home in such very superior company. Perhaps, after all, she had better marry Georgie Lisle. The boy is a very nice boy, in his way; and I dare say she'll get to be awfully fond of him, in time. Anyhow *we* can't do anything more, can we? Now, to come to a practical matter, what is to become of my Albanian Joseph? Does he disappear from this moment? and how am I to account for his coming like a shadow and so departing? Must we say he was a mere ghost; or shall I give out that I have packed him off to Albania again?"

"As if it mattered," Romont said; "as if you or I cared about that. Come, Mrs. Pollen, don't be angry with me; I can't stand it; I must have you for my friend and on my side. You see how outspoken I am with you; I don't keep any of my thoughts from you."

"All right," Mrs. Pollen said. "I am not easily offended and I am very easily appeased. Now about your scruples. Must you tell your divinity the part you have played?"

"Oh yes," he answered quietly, but very firmly. "I could not keep that from her. If I tell her what I know, I must tell her how I came to know it. Why, the whole strength of my position is that I know it from her lips, almost; yes, it was really from her own lips. But in any case I would tell her."

"Must you tell her now?"

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"Now? Why, of course. At what other time could I tell her, if not now?"

"After," Mrs. Pollen said coolly.

"After what?"

"Oh, you most stupid young man! after you are married, to be sure. It would be all right then."

Romont positively coloured like a girl.

"Oh no, that would never do; that would be a marrying under false pretences. Besides, I think it is very, very doubtful whether she will ever marry me at all. She isn't like other girls."

"No girl ever is," said Mrs. Pollen.

"Ever is what?"

"Ever is like other girls. At least, I never yet heard a man admit that the girl he was mashed upon was one bit like other girls; and I never knew a girl who admitted or believed that she was like other girls. Well, you must only throw yourself upon her mercy. *I* wouldn't if I were you; but that's another matter."

"What would you do?"

"Tell her that I loved her, and that I knew she loved me; and that we were to be married, and not listen to a single word to the contrary. Show her that you meant what you said and were the master. I wish I might do the love-making for you."

"No, thanks," Romont said, with a brightening smile; "I mean to do my love-making all for myself."

"Very well; but do it."

No one could have been more surprised than Romont himself if he had been told that while he was arguing with Mrs. Pollen he was not perfectly sincere. He thought he was sincere; he believed that he was giving expression to the truest feelings of his heart. But the moment he had left her, the moment he found himself alone, then the real feelings broke out and overwhelmed all others. In the sublime egotism of the lover he yielded himself to the mere rapture of the thought, "She loves me; she loves me; come what will, she loves me; nothing can ever alter *that*." He did indeed feel alarmed and a little ashamed as to the part he had played; ashamed on his own account, alarmed at the thought of how Camiola might take it. He felt a little like another Claude Melnotte playing off a shabby trick at the expense of a beautiful and innocent girl. He began to think he had no more right to find out her secret by means of his mummer's disguise than he would have had to act the part of a spy on her or to open her letters. How would she take it? Mrs. Pollen, of course, was absolutely unscrupulous in such a matter, and could hardly understand Romont's scruples; but would Camiola take that view? Sometimes he felt certain that she would not; that she would resent the trick played off on her. All the same he was determined that she must know it. But for that, he thought, she might be induced to break off her engagement with Georgie Lisle; the disguise and the discovery being actual facts would make her pause, he feared. "Still she loves me," he told himself again and again; "she will never marry *him*."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A SAD SUNDAY.

Of all the days that are in the week, the dreariest to all outward appearance for Fitzurseham proper, was the day that comes between the Saturday and Monday. The great majority of the inhabitants in the poorer streets never could be induced to go to church. The women had not, as they pleaded, clothes good enough for church; the men did not even entertain the idea of going there. There was a park in the immediate neighbourhood, and people from other quarters came in crowds every Sunday to disport themselves there. But the regular inhabitant of Fitzurseham did not care to go to the park any more than to church. One reason of his for not visiting the park was that the only house of refreshment within its enclosure was a place where no liquid more stimulating than ginger-beer was allowed to be sold. In the lower quarters of Fitzurseham the men merely hung about with short pipes in their mouths until the public-houses were opened, and as long as the public-houses remained open the men remained in them. At night there was a good deal of singing and shouting to be heard in the public-houses, and for a time in the streets after the public-houses had closed; and later still there was a good deal of shrieking from some of the dwelling-houses. Nobody much minded. A wife, perhaps, had been "nagging" her husband, and the husband at last or at first took to beating or kicking the wife. That was common in Fitzurseham, and disturbed nobody but the kicked wife; and even she was so accustomed to it that she could hardly be said to be disturbed by it.

We have to speak now of one particular Sunday, the Sunday after that described in the last chapter. A duller Sunday had not been spent by any one in Fitzurseham than was spent by Vinnie Lammas and her mother. The mother and daughter had gone to church; they never missed attending church on the Sunday. This Sunday they had both in their minds a particular reason for going which neither would for all the world have hinted, not to say confided, to the other. They were anxious to see if Walter Fitzurse would be there. Walter was not in the habit previously of troubling himself much about going to any church; he always lounged by the river while Vinnie and her mother performed their devotions, and then he used to wait for Vinnie outside the church door, and they would go off on a ramble together. That was in the old days—the dear, dear old days which came to an end only a few weeks ago. Vinnie had not once seen Walter since the night at Fitzurse House; but something told her that he would be at church on the Sunday. She had heard that Mr. and Mrs. Lisle were in London, and that Janette was at the rectory. Walter was at church, and when the service was over he joined Janette and her brother and

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Camiola, and walked devoutly by Janette's side. It must not be supposed, however, that he cut the Lammas pair or behaved rudely or unkindly to them. Oh no; he went over and spoke to them in the churchyard; he even left Janette Lisle for a moment to speak to Mrs. and Miss Lammas; he took off his hat to them with the grace and dignity of a lord; he asked after Mrs. Lammas's health, and hoped she had not taken cold, and said Vinnie was looking charming, and that he had not been able to call on them these later days because he had had some business that kept him very much in London. Then he went back to Miss Lisle. It was clear from the first that he meant to go back to her; and they disappeared, Walter, as has been said, walking side by side with Janette. Vinnie had a naturally quick eye; and it was still further quickened in this instance by the eagerness of her mind; and she saw that Janette kept her face turned to the ground while Walter talked to her, and she even saw that there was a heightened colour on Miss Lisle's cheek. How handsome he looked, poor Vinnie thought; how like a prince!—Vinnie's notions of princes were, it is almost needless to say, taken chiefly from story-books—and so they went off together in the direction of the rectory, while Vinnie and her mother went the other way. Vinnie dropped her veil, and was for the most part silent, only now and then making some remark of enforced sprightliness far beyond any mortal sprightliness which comes by nature.

Why do people, why do women especially, keep up a deceit which is no deception, which does not in the least deceive those whom it is meant to beguile? Why did Vinnie and her mother now play off this foolish, futile game one against the other? Mrs. Lammas could pierce to the very heart of all poor Vinnie's most secret thoughts. Vinnie was distinctly and altogether aware of this fact. Yet they went on playing at deception, each one knowing perfectly well that it did not deceive. Vinnie talked once or twice of how well Walter was looking and how pretty Miss Lisle was, and how nice it was for Lady Letitia to be so nice to Walter, and Mrs. Lammas tried to answer in the same strain; and they kept up their little private theatricals in this way until they reached home. In her heart Mrs. Lammas was brooding over one thought which now for some inscrutable reason possessed her. She was thinking of the husband she had lost, the husband of her youth, who had loved his little Vinnie so dearly when she was a child; she was asking herself what he would feel if he were to know that his daughter, his little idol, was breaking her heart because of a faithless lover. Vinnie was thinking of the Sundays which she and her lover used to pass together, and how happy they were; and she could hardly keep down her irritation when her mother spoke to her, and she had to put on again the air of one who is not conscious of anything vexatious, or painful, or out of the way.

They got home, these poor dreary women, and they had their

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dismal little two-o'clock dinner. Then Vinnie got a book, a novel, and tried, not to read, but to look as if she were reading, mainly in order to avoid being talked to by her mother. She sat in the window, and kept her eye on the front gate. When she did not look at it she listened for its slightest sound; it must swing on its hinges before any one could enter that house. She still had some hope that Walter would come that day, some time or other, to see her. She longed to see him; longed with an almost sickening craving. Even if all must soon be over with them, still, still she would have liked the evil day postponed; she would like to see him even once again. The day went on, the evening came, the level sunlight shot its darts into the window and dazzled Vinnie so that she could not see the front gate; and Walter did not come.

"Wouldn't you like to go out for a walk, Vinnie dear?" Mrs. Lammas asked timidly.

"Oh no, mamma; the streets are horrid now; they are crowded with noisy people."

"Would you like if we were to run up and see Mrs. Noble? Mollie Noble is at home now, you know."

"No, dear; I don't care about Mollie Noble. Wouldn't you like to go yourself? You have plenty of time before tea."

Mrs. Lammas sighed, and said she did not care to go.

The evening deepened; and at last Mrs. Lammas lighted the lamp. She did not, however, draw down the blinds, as she knew Vinnie would still like to keep watch, and it was not yet dark; but she lighted the lamp and drew it near her, that she might read the Bible and try to distract her thoughts from the concerns of earth. They had an ancient piano, a relic of better days. Vinnie got up from her seat at the window and began to play a hymn; bringing out a good deal of feeling from the keys of the jingling old instrument.

Mrs. Lammas had suppressed all hint of her fears and her doubts thus far; but at last she felt that she must say something. So she began with—"Vinnie dear."

Vinnie, without turning round, asked, "What is it, mamma?"

"Do you think Walter is coming to-night?"

"I don't know, mamma."

Another pause.

"Vinnie dear."

"Yes, mamma."

"Don't you think there is something the matter with Walter? He seemed put out like to-day, I thought."

"Stuff, mamma! You are always fancying there is something wrong with everybody; with Walter and me, at all events. You dear old thing! you wouldn't be happy if you were not frightening yourself and making yourself miserable."

"Well, dear, I am an anxious woman, I know that, and I do often trouble myself about nothing. But still, now don't you really

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think there was something a little odd in his manner? He hadn't heard any bad news, had he? Does anything trouble him?"

"Now, like a good, dear mammy, please don't worry yourself and tease me. I don't know anything about him—about anything that troubles him. If there is anything, he didn't tell me."

"He would have told you, dearest, surely if there was anything, wouldn't he?"

"I dare say—I dare say. Do stop, mamma." She was a loving daughter, but one of those loving daughters who cannot keep from giving sharp answers now and then. It was her way, indeed, to treat Mrs. Lammas rather as if she were a younger sister than a matron and a mother.

So Mrs. Lammas said no more on the subject just then, but stole a glance at her daughter, and thought none the less because she did not speak.

The girl kept on with her hymn and her piano. The dusk was falling grey and ghostly over the dull, flat, low-lying desolation of the scene without. Her heart was not in her music that evening. She kept ever and anon glancing at the darkening window, expecting or hoping from minute to minute to hear the gate move, and then a familiar step. More and more the shadows deepened; more and more the pleasant glow of the lamp reddened in the dusk; and no one came. Mrs. Lammas bent her head over her reading; she could not see through the window from where she was sitting, but her ear watched with painful tension to hear the gate turn on its rusty hinges; and the gate remained silent as herself. The sounds of the piano grew slower and slower, and presently ceased altogether; and the mother could see that her daughter was only gazing at the darkening window-panes. At last Vinnie closed the piano and got up.

"Don't you want your tea, poor dear old mother?" she said, in a tone of unusual softness and tenderness. "Shan't I get it ready? It's growing ever so late. It has positively grown quite dark. What a patient old mother you are to wait all this time and never say a word!"

"Don't you think we had better wait a little longer, Vinnie?"

"For what, dear?"

"For Walter; he may come later."

"For Walter!" The girl broke out into a wild hysterical laugh which sounded unearthly and uncanny in the dusk, and quite frightened Mrs. Lammas.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed.

"He'll never come any more, mamma; never, never. He doesn't care about me any more. I have lost him; oh, it's too bad, too bad; he doesn't care for me any more!"

She flung herself on her knees beside Mrs. Lammas, and hid her face like a child in her mother's lap, and gave full way to all the hysterical pain and passion that was in her. The mother stroked her hair and soothed and petted her with hardly articulate

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words of tenderness, as one tries to soothe a child or some suffering dumb creature, but did not for the moment try to interfere by question or remonstrance with the rush of her grief; let the blood flow freely from the bruised and wounded heart. Mrs. Lammas always became helpful and strong and judicious when anything had to be done for anybody; and she knew every turn and mood and tone of her daughter's nature. The wild stream of grief and pain checked itself at last—stopped from sheer exhaustion—and the girl raised her head.

"That's done me good," she said, with a sickly attempt to smile. "Good gracious, mamma, what a fool I am!"

"We are all like that, my dear, we women, when we are young and when we are in love," Mrs. Lammas said. "But tell me, my dear child, what put that foolish notion into your head? What made you think that Walter doesn't care about you any more?" Mrs. Lammas had just the same foolish notion in her own head.

"It's not foolish, mamma; it's too true. It was foolish of me to give way so; but what I say is the truth. He doesn't care for me any more. He never will care for me again. I know it; something has told me of it. I feel it in my very heart. Oh, I have been thinking of it these some days, although I wouldn't let on even to you; and you have been thinking of it too. He is in love with Miss Lisle. I don't wonder; I don't blame him, hardly. How could he help it? She's a handsome girl, and she's a lady, and has culture, and is grand, and all that; and she's very nice to him and kind to him, and, oh, so different from a poor little ignorant girl like me—and—and—there—that's all about it."

"But he must be mad if he thinks of her; a lady like that; he must be crazy."

"What's the good of that to me, mamma, even if he is crazy? I suppose young men in love often are crazy. He's in love with her, and that's enough for me. I have lost him; that's the point so far as I am concerned." She was trying to pluck up a little of her usual spirit, but the effort was not very successful.

"He'll be sorry for this one day—if it's true," Mrs. Lammas exclaimed.

"Not he, mamma; why should he? He'll be sorry if he doesn't get her; but he'll not be sorry for me. It's common enough in life, surely, for a man to throw over one girl for another, when he likes the other better; it happens every day; only we don't like it when it's brought home to ourselves; that's all. I dare say I shouldn't have minded if he had thrown over some other girl for me; I shouldn't have troubled myself much about that girl's feelings. Now it's my own case, and I have to bear it."

The gate was heard to move upon its rusty hinges. Mrs. Lammas looked up with eagerness and hope.

"It's not he," Vinnie said. "It's—it's Mr. Pilgrim, I think."

Mrs. Lammas was glad it was anybody. Mr. Pilgrim or another was welcome, in the hope that he might break the gloom. To

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women of Mrs. Lammas's age and temperament the two most dreaded things in any trouble are loneliness and silence. It was Mr. Pilgrim. He came in, looking more pale and ghostlike than ever. Mrs. Lammas had always been glad to see Mr. Pilgrim. At one time he used to visit them a great deal, while he was teaching Vinnie shorthand. For the last few weeks, however, they had not seen him. He was busy, naturally, about the renovation of Fitzurse House. Mrs. Lammas had a sort of idea that Pilgrim rather fancied Vinnie, which idea amused her and made her feel kindly and pitying towards poor Pilgrim. Think of Vinnie caring for a man of his age; even if there were not the handsome young lover, Walter Fitzurse! But Mrs. Lammas made up her mind that if Walter were not in the way, Mr. Pilgrim would make love to Vinnie. Now she gave Pilgrim a welcome which was more than usually cordial. It was an intense relief to her that he had come in to disturb their solitude.

"You'll have some tea with us, Mr. Pilgrim, won't you?" the widow said; and she made signs at Pilgrim that he was to say "Yes."

Pilgrim said a gloomy "Yes." He saw that some trouble was in the air. He was much troubled himself; but he felt for the Lammases. He liked both mother and daughter very much; he was really fond of Vinnie, although not in the way Mrs. Lammas imagined. He took a genuine interest in the girl; he thought her far too good and too quick-witted to be thrown away upon forlorn Fitzurseham. He had long known of her attachment to Walter, and of her engagement with him, and he did not think the prospect for her altogether satisfactory even before the Lisles had come back to Fitzurseham. He had had an intimate knowledge of Walter since Walter was a child, and he saw down to the very depths of that restless, egotistic, ambitious, dreamy nature. He knew that Walter was in love with himself and not with any girl; or rather with the Eidolon, the image of Walter Fitzurse, which he had created for himself, and on which the eyes of his soul were for ever turned in admiring contemplation. Perhaps, if Camiola Sabine had not come in his way, poor Pilgrim's vague unconsolidated yearnings for love might have centred themselves on Vinnie; but Camiola Sabine came in his way, and we have seen what happened to him.

Mrs. Lammas left the room in order to occupy herself in preparations for tea.

"I haven't seen much of you lately, Vinnie."

"No, Mr. Pilgrim. You don't come to see us."

"I have been so busy. I hope you are not neglecting your shorthand practice."

"I haven't been doing much lately," the girl said listlessly. "I don't suppose I shall ever make much of it. Have you seen Walter to-day?" she asked timidly.

"No; I haven't seen him to-day, Vinnie."

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"Not all the day? Not at any time to-day?"

"Not at any time to-day, or yesterday. I haven't seen him these many days. He doesn't care much about me now," Pilgrim added, with a certain bitterness. "He has his grand friends." He had hardly spoken the words when he was sorry for having uttered them.

Poor Vinnie burst into tears. "Oh, and he doesn't care for me either," she sobbed, "any more—any more. He has given me up; he has thrown me over. Oh, Mr. Pilgrim, I am so much ashamed to be seen by you and giving way like this! Why can't I have some self-control?"

"There, there," Pilgrim said hurriedly and awkwardly, for he did not know in the least how to set about consoling or soothing a girl under the circumstances. "Never mind, Vinnie dear; never mind, that's a good child."

"How can I help minding?" was the not unreasonable question. "My heart is breaking; it's broken, I think."

"Hearts don't break," Pilgrim exclaimed, so suddenly and fiercely that the girl stopped in her wail and looked wonderingly at him; "they don't break; I wish to God they did!"

"Why, Mr. Pilgrim, what *is* the matter? You look quite put out—quite wild. Has anything happened?" His voice and manner frightened her; she drew away from him.

"Do you think I am going mad?" he asked grimly. "I am not; I wish I could go mad, girl."

"Mr. Pilgrim, I don't think you ought to talk in that way. Fancy wishing that you were mad! I wish I was dead, but I don't wish I was mad. Oh, God forbid!"

"Well, Vinnie, one doesn't die for wishing it; and I suppose one doesn't go mad for wishing it. However, I think you are right in rebuking me for making such an exhibition of myself; and it was not for that I came here."

"Tell me something about him—about Walter; please do," she entreated.

"I have little to tell. He does not live in this place any longer. He has ceased to be a grub, and has turned into quite the butterfly; quite the butterfly. In plainer words, Vinnie, he is living now at the West End, in handsome lodgings, and is exhibiting himself as a regular fine gentleman."

"But, Mr. Pilgrim, where does he get the money?"

Vinnie was positively astonished out of her grief for the moment. Her personal suffering had gone down before the shock of mere curiosity.

"It isn't for me to say anything about that." Pilgrim knew, of course, that Walter had been enabled by Mrs. Pollen thus to enter upon the butterfly stage of his existence; but Pilgrim never breathed a word of anything done by Mrs. Pollen unless he had her express directions to do so. In this case he had no faith in the success of her experiment; nor, indeed, had she much, by this time.

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"Well, I have lost him, anyhow," Vinnie said wearily, sinking down in sheer dejection once again.

"I have come to you with a message," Pilgrim said.

"From Walter; oh, from Walter?" The sudden wild light that came into poor Vinnie's eyes was sad to see for one who knew the disappointment that must follow.

"Not from Walter, Vinnie; you know I am not likely to be made a messenger by Walter. You said this moment that you had lost him. Have you made up your mind to that, or have you not? Has he left you, or has he not?"

"But one always hopes; one keeps hoping," Vinnie pleaded.

"My poor child, yes," Pilgrim said very kindly and tenderly; and he put his hand on her curly head. She was seated or squatted on the hearth beside him. "For one who is young like you there is always hope, thank God. I ought to have thought of that. I ought to have remembered that you were not like me. Well, I have brought you a message. Don't you want to know what it is?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Pilgrim." She did not, however, seem particularly eager about it.

"It is from Mrs. Pollen."

"Yes?" To all appearance she had not any great concern in the purport of the message.

Mrs. Lammas had just come back into the room.

"She wants to see you to-morrow, up at Fitzurse House. She takes a great interest in you, Vinnie; and I shouldn't wonder if she wanted you to become her secretary."

Once this message would have made Vinnie dance about her room with joy. Now she took it wearily.

"I don't think I could do it, Mr. Pilgrim; I don't, indeed."

Mrs. Lammas sighed. "Things don't ever seem to come at the right time," she said. She was thinking that but a few weeks ago the proffered patronage of the rich and beneficent Mrs. Pollen would have set Vinnie wild with delight, and now Vinnie did not seem to care in the least about it; apparently regarded it rather as a trouble.

"She is a kind woman and a good woman," Pilgrim said, almost sternly; "it will do you good to talk to her; you may tell her anything you like—or, indeed, you need not tell her much; she will understand what you mean before you have said it."

"I don't want to talk to any one," Vinnie murmured. "I think I only want to be let alone."

She got up and began to walk about the little room. She walked with listless air and with a curiously heavy tread. It would seem as if the weight at her heart had sent lead into her feet as well.

"She'll go to see the lady to-morrow, of course, Mr. Pilgrim," Mrs. Lammas said. "It's very kind of Mrs. Pollen, I'm sure; and Vinnie feels it just as well as I do; only she's a little put out, to-night, with things."

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Vinnie had now come to a stand by the window, and was staring out into the darkening night. Pilgrim went quietly up to her.

"I am sorry to see you in trouble, Vinnie; indeed I am. I feel for you very much; you are one of the few human creatures I really care about; but you'll get over this, my dear child; you'll get over this: you are young."

"It's no use telling me I'll get over it," Vinnie cried out passionately. "There's no comfort to me in being told that I'll get over it. I don't want to get over it. Why should I? How could I? It won't make any difference a few days passing, will it? I shall be the same, and—and—he'll be the same; he has left me; and—and what's the use of talking? Oh, there; I am ashamed of myself; but you don't understand, Mr. Pilgrim—I suppose a man couldn't understand—how one hates to be comforted and cheered up, and all that; how one hates every one in the world, friends and all—when one feels as I do now. Oh, I don't know what I am saying, but I'll not bear this trouble. I'll not bear it. I know that."

Vinnie hurried out of the room.

"Won't you go after her?" Pilgrim asked.

"Oh no," Mrs. Lammas said sadly; "it's better not, Mr. Pilgrim; she is better left to herself. Girls are so queer in these ways. She has always been the best of daughters; but I know there are times when it would only worry her if even her mother were to go to her. No; she's better left alone just for a little. Are you going? Good night, Mr. Pilgrim; I'm sorry we were so dull when you came." She looked very miserable.

"It is better sometimes to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting," he said. "That is," he added, in his curious meditative way, "if we look upon the house of mourning as something got up entirely for the spiritual improvement of the people who do not happen to be mourners just at that moment. In that way I am improving myself at your expense and that of poor Vinnie, Mrs. Lammas."

Mrs. Lammas did not understand in the least what he meant or what he was talking about. Pilgrim left the house and walked slowly towards his home. The soft, warm breath of the summer evening still lingered everywhere. The artistic touch of the gathering dusk delicately effaced from sight all commonplace or unsightly outlines and objects, and the dull street might have been a path in an Arcadian village. Groups of people were wandering here and there; and Pilgrim passed many a couple whose subdued whisper as they went along told the lovers' tale as clearly as it could be told under Sicilian boughs. There was bitterness in Pilgrim's heart, and he saw with soured sentiment each happy, whispering pair. One couple in particular attracted his attention. The girl was pretty; the young man was better dressed than she, and seemed to belong to a better class.

"All right," Pilgrim murmured almost aloud as he turned and

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looked after them. "Enjoy your Sunday evening, my pretty, fond little girl, while you can. There will soon come a Sunday when he won't care to keep his appointment with you, and what will you do then? Will you remember that there is a river near, I wonder? I shouldn't be surprised if Vinnie Lammas was thinking of something of the kind just now."

He walked on and soon came in sight of the river. It set him thinking as he looked this way and that along the darkling stream; this way towards London, where the cloud of dull orange glow was resting; that way to the green fields, and woods, and delicious backwaters, and overhanging trees which he could not see, but could think of, could picture to himself; the fields where when a boy he had never played, the trees which he had never had time or heart to climb, all the rich and various beauties of the landscape which his hard life had never allowed him to enjoy while he was still within the years that leave enjoyment a chance. He was not now thinking of himself, however, or of his lost youth. As he looked on the filling river—the tide was still coming in—he was more and more thinking of Vinnie Lammas and of her ominous words as she was leaving the room. What if she were to come down to the river that night? It was the natural thing, the familiar thing, the hideously common thing for a deserted girl to do. Not a day's paper that does not tell some such sad and frequent story. What if Vinnie should come that Sunday evening to the churchyard where on other Sunday evenings she used to meet her lover, and should seek for rest in the rising waters of the river? That spot which so often saw her happiness, which must be associated in her mind with the best hours of happiness she had ever known—what place could be more appropriate for a broken-hearted girl's farewell to life? The thought began to fill Pilgrim's perturbed mind. It grew to be a conviction, a fixed forecast with him. "I will stay here; I will watch," he determined. "If she ever attempts it she will attempt it this very night, and from the wall of the churchyard."

CHAPTER XIX.

"RIVER OF REMORSE AND INNOCENCY."

SUDDENLY Pilgrim was hailed from the road out of which he had turned to reach the river-side.

"Hallo, Pilgrim!"

"Mr. Romont, is it you?"

"Why, certainly, Pilgrim! You look a little surprised to see me!"

"Well, yes; I am a little surprised, Mr. Romont."

Pilgrim became rather embarrassed. He would have said, if he had spoken out his mind, "I am surprised to see you going about openly in your ordinary costume and your own person, seeing that you are supposed to be somewhere far out of London, and that

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Albanian Joseph is still supposed to be in Fitzurseham." Pilgrim had never asked a question or said a word to him about Albanian Joseph; but he knew perfectly well who Albanian Joseph was, and Romont always knew he did. What little plot Mrs. Pollen and Romont had in hand Pilgrim could not guess, but he had a vague presentiment borne in upon him, he could not tell how, that it would prove to have something to do with Camiola Sabine. He knew it would be some purpose of good to her, but his heart was sad all the same. Every thought of her wounded him. He had not seen her since that fatal day when he made such a lamentable exhibition of his madness, and he dreaded to look her in the face again.

"I am in Fitzurseham again, Pilgrim, as you see. There is a time for folly and a time to be sane. I am trying to be sane just now."

"Were you up at the house? Were you looking for me?"

"No; I haven't been up at Fitzurse House; and the truth is, I wasn't looking for you, Pilgrim. But I am glad to see you all the same. Are you meditating on the flowing on of life as you look at that shining river?"

There was an enforced gaiety in Romont's manner which did not escape even Pilgrim's notice.

"Have you been at the rectory, Mr. Romont? Have you heard how Mr. George is getting on?"

"No; I haven't been at the rectory, Pilgrim—at least I didn't go in, and I didn't make any inquiry; and I haven't the slightest doubt that Mr. George is getting on as well as his most devoted friends could possibly desire. That sort of fellow always does get on all right, don't you think?"

Pilgrim wondered what could have induced Mr. Romont to walk to the rectory and not go in or even make an inquiry. Romont had been in a restless mood all the evening, and he had wandered away vaguely from St. James's Street, and found himself at last idly lounging round and round that part of Fitzurseham where the rectory stood. If there be any man or woman still young or having memory of youth who requires to be told, as Christian Pilgrim apparently did, why Romont hovered in the neighbourhood of the rectory, then on that man or woman are love-stories and love's experiences thrown utterly away.

"But what are you doing here, Pilgrim? You look like a watcher; as if you were on the look-out for something?"

"I am on the look-out for something, Mr. Romont; perhaps you will think me absurd if I tell you."

"My good fellow, what does it matter whether I think you absurd or not? What does it matter whether you are absurd or not? Are we not all absurd, every one of us, at almost any hour in the day? I hope to Heaven that you are tremendously, insanely, preposterously absurd, Pilgrim; because you will then keep me all the better in countenance."

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"I know at least that you won't laugh at what I am going to say to you."

"I don't think I feel much in the laughing humour, Pilgrim; but go ahead."

At another time Pilgrim might have paid serious attention to Romont's words and manner, and might even, in his humble, friendly way, have pressed for some explanation. Now his mind was absorbed in one thought. He told his thought to Romont in as few words as he could put it into. Romont did not laugh, but shook his head very gravely.

"Of course, this is mere conjecture, Pilgrim, and there may be nothing in it."

"Of course; of course, Mr. Romont."

"But still," Romont said, "I am almost inclined to think with you that something bad may be coming. Things do look ominous, and I am absurd even to attach some importance to the fact that the notion has taken so strong a hold on your mind. If she ever were going to do it, here, certainly, would be the likeliest spot. Anyhow, no harm can come of our waiting and watching."

"Will you keep me company, Mr. Romont?"

"Of course I will. I am just thinking what we had better do. Look here! we'll get into one of these little boats. There's one lying off the Old Ferry Inn—we'll get into it and just go out mid-stream and get behind one of the big barges there, and keep our eyes fixed on the shore and the churchyard wall. Makes one feel creepy, doesn't it? But that's the thing to do, you may be sure. If the attempt is made here, Pilgrim, we can save her."

"What would you think, Mr. Romont, now that you are here to keep watch, if I were to go back to Mrs. Lammas's house and tell her of our suspicions, and get her to look after Vinnie?"

"Wouldn't think about it at all, Pilgrim."

"No, Mr. Romont?"

"No."

"Not tell the girl's mother and put her on her guard?"

"Certainly not, Pilgrim."

Pilgrim was absolutely dumfounded. Not to go at once and tell the girl's mother; not to put her on her guard; not to have some restraint used with Vinnie! This was marvellous. Only his implicit faith in Romont could stand it.

"My good fellow," Romont said, "don't you see that if the girl is bent on killing herself, nothing on earth can prevent her trying? To go and frighten her mother, and set her mother to frighten her, would be the stupidest policy in the world. It would only come to this, that Vinnie would put off her attempt to some time and place where we should not be standing by to prevent her. The best thing we can do is to let her try here under our very eyes."

Pilgrim's breath was almost taken away.

"But suppose we don't succeed in saving her?"

"Of course we'll save her. What is the matter with us? If

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she does come here the thing is easy ; and if she doesn't come here, then we can't tell where she may go, It is an off-chance, but it is a chance; I think she will come here."

"Then don't you think we should stop her?"

"No; no, no. The only thing is to let her go right into the river. Many a girl when once she is in would endure the worst sufferings in life to be out again. If they are pulled out they become ashamed of the whole affair, the row, and the scandal, and the exposure, and all the rest of it; and they get back to their better senses. No; girls don't often try that sort of thing a second time."

"I suppose you are right, Mr. Romont. You are sure you can save her?"

"Of course; of course. My good fellow, do you think I never saved any one from drowning in my life?" Romont spoke as if saving people from drowning were one of the commonest incidents in an ordinary man's life.

"I am sure I never did," said Pilgrim sadly.

"Lots of things you never did, Pilgrim. But there's one thing I know you can do, and that is—obey orders."

"Yes, I can do that."

"Very well, then. If anything should happen—if we should see anything, you had better let me boss this business—let me manage it all, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, Mr. Romont."

"I think I am a cooler hand, don't you know; and if this should happen we must bear in mind that we haven't merely to prevent the poor thing from coming to any harm just now, but we have to prevent her from ever trying it on again. Do you understand what I mean now, Pilgrim?"

"I don't think I do, Mr. Romont; but it doesn't matter, if you do. I'll just take my orders."

"All right; you will understand after."

There was silence for some moments. Nothing was heard by the two watching men but the lapping of the water against their own boat, and round the bows of the barge behind which they lay sheltered, and the occasional barking of a dog on shore, and the chiming of a clock in some belfry tower.

"Ten o'clock! If she is coming at all," Pilgrim said in a low whisper, "she won't be long now. Keep a sharp look-out, Mr. Romont; your sight is better than mine."

"Why do you think it will be soon now?"

"She will wait until her mother has gone to bed—that will be before ten."

"Oh!"

There was another pause, and for a longer time. Pilgrim was growing almost sick with nervous anxiety. Although there was no moon the skies were singularly clear, and the eye travelled far under that luminous atmosphere. The watchers were peering

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cautiously out from behind the shelter of the barge and her heavy rudder. There must have been many feet of water under the old churchyard wall. There was rather a strong current running towards London.

"Hush!" said Romont, in a voice so low that the ripple of the waves was noise to it. His quick ears had caught the sound of some movement like the crunching of gravel in the churchyard. The gates of the churchyard were always closed at nights, but there was a kind of roadway, or "hard," running down to the river, parallel with that one of the churchyard walls which ran from the river inland, and parts of this wall were so low, and the rough roadway mounted in places so high, that any one could easily get over the wall and in among the graves and tombs. Unquestionably some one had leaped down from the wall into the churchyard; and now a hurried, irregular tread could be heard by the watchers behind the barge.

Yes; it was a girl. Pilgrim had guessed aright. The figure of a woman was plainly seen now by both the men. The woman came to the wall which looked over the river, and stood a moment and stared across the waters and up at the sky and back on the church itself. Then she flung off her bonnet and shawl and mounted on to the wall. She stood there one moment, and a half-suppressed cry or moan broke from her.

Pilgrim was about to push off the boat and shout to the girl to stop, but Romont seized him by the shoulder and held him in his place, making at the same time vehement gestures to him to keep quiet. It needed all Pilgrim's confidence in Romont's judgment to enable him to keep quiet at such a moment. "She will do it!" he said to his own affrighted soul; "she will do it in a second while we are waiting here." Yes; he was right. She has done it. She sprang wildly from the wall, a splash and a stifled shriek were heard, and poor Vinnie Lammas was in the Thames.

"Keep quiet," said Romont almost harshly to Pilgrim. "Sit still, don't stir; leave this to me."

He took the sculls as quietly as if he were merely about to amuse himself with a late paddle on the river, and gently pushed the boat away from the shelter of the dark barge. Pilgrim covered his face with his hands. He could not bear to look up or around him. Romont sculled the boat lightly with the current, shooting several rapid strokes ahead, and looking keenly out over his shoulder the while.

"Now then, Pilgrim, here we are!"

Getting courage from Romont's cool composure, Pilgrim looked up, and made ready to do something, he did not quite know what. Romont was resting on his oars and waiting. Suddenly Pilgrim saw something come floating, bobbing, dancing down the stream. It was the back of a woman's head. He could see nothing but that at first; it seemed like a curly-haired head, with no body attached.

"All right," said Romont, in a low, reassuring tone; and, ship-

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ping his sculls, he crept over Pilgrim to the stern of the boat, and put both his arms under Vinnie's head, and held it up by the short curling hair. "Catch hold of the sculls, Pilgrim, and pull like mad for the shore."

Romont was in reality much excited, but he spoke as composedly as if all this sort of thing were happening every day.

"For the barge, Mr. Romont?" Pilgrim asked, in doubt and excitement.

"No, no! for the shore! Man alive, we couldn't get her into this boat, and we couldn't get the barge ashore. Go ahead!"

Pilgrim was pulling with heroic vigour and unheroic awkwardness. A very few strokes brought them close up to the landing-place just under the churchyard. Romont here stepped into the water and lifted Vinnie out of it. He was now standing on the shore, holding her in his arms, her pallid, corpse-like face resting on his shoulder. She was still insensible, but full of life and shivering all over.

"Take off your coat, Pilgrim, and wrap it tightly round her—wrap it as if you were wrapping a mummy; that will get some heat into her again. Good; very well done. Now, just contrive somehow to get off this coat of mine; bear a hand this way. Gently now while I just lift her head a little. There—there—quietly. Don't stir her more than you can help. That's it; all right. Now wrap my coat tightly round her feet and ankles. That's the way. Now then, you had better carry her; this way, don't you see, just as you would carry a child. And now we had better start. I'll just make fast the boat."

Romont had a kind of idea that, when Vinnie came to and heard what had happened, she would rather know that she had been carried in the arms of the elder than of the younger man.

"One moment, Pilgrim." Romont employed his handkerchief to dry, as well as he could, Vinnie's curly hair and her face. "Now, stoop down—kneel down; she must have swallowed a lot of water. Hold her head just a little this way; yes, that will be all right."

A little torrent of water gushed from the girl's mouth, as Romont had expected that it would; and she sobbed and shuddered convulsively, opened her eyes once or twice in a sightless way, and sank off again insensible, but evidently relieved.

"Now we may go on again; but not too fast. Is she very cold?"

"I don't think she is so very cold now, Mr. Romont; except her face, perhaps."

"No matter about that; just keep these coats round her as tightly as you can. The women won't be long getting her plenty of hot blankets up at the house, I suppose? Shall I run on before and tell them?"

"At what house, Mr. Romont?"

"Why at Fitzurse House, to be sure."

"But there's nobody there."

They kept going on all the same, for as yet they had not reached

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the main road, and only when they got there would it be necessary for them to decide. It had not occurred to Romont that there could be any difficulty about carrying the rescued girl up to Fitzurse House at once. For a moment he became puzzled, when Pilgrim interposed his practical objection.

"By Jove! I never thought of that. Are there no women to-night up at the house?"

"Not a ghost of a woman. Mrs. Pollen and her maid went away hours ago."

"Then there's nothing for it but to take her to the rectory. We can't go into the Old Ferry Inn and have all Fitzurseham gaping over the story for the next week; and if we took her home we should only frighten her mother into fits, and find no one else who could do a hand's turn for the poor child. The rectory is a place we have all a claim on; and there are women enough there."

They were now tramping briskly along. Pilgrim found his physical strength come in useful to him now. He was carrying Vinnie with as much ease and tender care as if she were a little sick child.

"She will recover, Mr. Romont?" he asked plaintively, with his eyes fixed on the little dark and damp head that rested on his shoulder.

"Recover? of course she will. Her heart was beating nicely a moment ago. Here we are. She will be in better hands here than yours or mine, Pilgrim."

As they made for the door of the rectory Romont was thinking that he was sure to see Camiola, and was wondering what she would say when she saw this sudden apparition, and was wishing in his secret soul that he was in Vinnie Lammas's condition, on the off-chance that Camiola might have to do something for him.

CHAPTER XX.

"THIS NIGHT—TO MEET HERE!"

The rectory received Vinnie and her bearers with less excitement and confusion than might have been expected. In truth, there had been of late a remarkable renewal of relations between the rectory and the poverty of Fitzurseham; and the lawn and the gate were made the scene of many an appeal for counsel and help under various distressing and professing-to-be-distressed conditions. The servants, like the master and mistress, were getting pretty well drilled to the work. The master and the mistress were not at home when Vinnie was brought in; but Camiola and Janette were there, and Janette had been doing a good deal of ministering to the poor and sick lately, and Camiola was, in her way, as quick, cool, and practical as Romont himself. "I come from the working lot, you know," she was fond of saying; "and it is natural to me to turn a hand to anything." So Vinnie was quickly got into bed

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and nearly smothered in hot blankets, and a medical man was sent for from the town, who was at first elated at receiving a summons to the rectory, was then a little dashed in his pride when he found the patient was only poor Vinnie Lammas, and was restored to self-respect on discovering that it was a case of restoration from drowning which must become a fame all over the neighbourhood.

Christian Pilgrim found that there was nothing for him to do, and he therefore went drearily away, and wandered aimlessly for hours. He had not even seen Camiola; he did not want to see her; he dreaded the thought of seeing her. He fancied that, for all her kindness of heart and her generous words to him, she must in her soul despise and dislike him because of the unlucky exhibition he had made of his ridiculous passion. He pictured her in his own mind as quietly laughing to herself over her grisly, old, and pauper lover. He began to think now that Romont was in love with her, and this made him feel only more and more ashamed of himself and his folly. So he wandered about long lonely roads in much shame and misery, heartily wishing that he were in the Thames to remain there.

Romont hung about the house and the lawn in his wet clothes, not caring or knowing whether they were wet or dry. He was determined now not to leave the place until he had spoken to Camiola and told her everything. All day long he had been doubting and hesitating; feeling little satisfaction in the part he had played, and sadly afraid that Camiola would feel less satisfaction in it still. Now, however, as fate seemed to have driven him within the gate of the rectory, he was determined that all should come out, and an end be put to the matter one way or the other. The night was, as we have said, clear and soft; the stars shone in a pure deep blue. Even to Romont's perturbed soul the charm of the summer night air and of the light breath from the west brought a sense of hope. After all that had been done it was not yet nearly eleven o'clock.

Camiola had had her own trouble all day, and some troubles, too, that were not her own. She had to come to a decision about Janette Lisle. Janette had all but confessed to her that she was about to elope with her lover, Walter Fitzurse, before her father and mother came back from London. Walter was convinced that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia would not hear of his proposal for their daughter, and he was determined on carrying off the girl and marrying her at once. Janette implied that he had already made the necessary arrangements, and Camiola found argument, and appeal, and remonstrance, and passionate loving entreaty utterly thrown away upon the brain-sick girl. What was Camiola to do? The Rector and Lady Letitia would not be home until the night following; Georgie, even if he could be of much use, was not near. He had been persuaded to go to town to dine quietly with a comrade in arms who had just been sent back with despatches from Egypt, and in consequence of the state of his health he was to stay with

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his friend until the morning. Mrs. Pollen was not at hand. What was Camiola to do? She must take counsel with some one. In her despair she resolved when she saw Romont enter the house that she would take counsel with him.

Therefore Romont, standing on the lawn with his back to a tree, and his eyes on the house, saw a figure come from the open hall and through the doorway and out on the lawn. His heart beat fast; for it was Camiola. She was bareheaded; she was looking for something. "The time has come," he thought; "now for it."

Suddenly she saw him, and he thought she would draw back, and he was about to call to her and run towards her, fearing lest the longed-for, dreaded opportunity might be lost. But when she saw him she called to him and came towards him, panting and speaking very quickly in agitated, tremulous tones.

"Oh, Mr. Romont! I am so glad; I was afraid you had gone. I want to speak to you so much." She stopped and put her hand upon her beating heart.

"Yes," he said, "and I want to speak to you, too."

"Oh, well—— I have sent one of the maids to poor Mrs Lammas to waken her up and bring her here. That was the best thing to do, don't you think?"

"Certainly; of course."

"She will be here soon. Vinnie is nearly all right now."

"Yes; I thought she would be. She won't do it again?"

"I hope not—oh, I think not. She is very much ashamed and penitent, poor child. Heaven help her! But it wasn't about that I wanted to speak to you."

He waited patiently, not wondering so much about what she had to tell him as wondering what she would say when she heard what he had to tell her.

"It's about Janette, Mr. Romont. I am afraid she has allowed me to guess at a great secret of hers, and what am I to do? I have to speak to you," she said almost angrily; "there is no one else." She told him her story in a few direct words.

"This is a serious business," Romont said.

"Yes, what am I to do? Tell me."

"Send for Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia at once."

"You think so? You are sure I ought to do that? Would that be a breach of confidence? Is it a thing a man would do? Is it a thing you would do if you were in my place?"

"Most certainly. You said she did not actually confide this to you as a secret."

"No; she let it out, rather. We were alone, and we were talking together over things—not very gladsome, perhaps, and it was evening, and melancholy; and Janette became almost hysterical, and I got to know or guess somehow—from the way she clung to me and kissed me, and begged me always to think well of her—I knew that something was going to happen. How I came to know it I can't quite tell now Then you would tell her father and Lady Letitia?"

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"Of course I would. I would save the child from that fellow at any risk. If you only knew all about him! Look here, Miss Sabine, he took me in at first; but now I know what sort of a cad he is. He has already got mixed up with one of the worst lots of fast men about town, and he adores them because some of them are swells, you know, and he delights in their titles and all that, and being seen with them. I don't believe he really cares about Janette; in fact, I know, oh—well, there"—he was near being hurried into the statement of certain facts which led him to believe that Walter's affections were at all events not wholly absorbed by Janette—"he is a bad lot, and getting worse and worse. He has no money, and he has no way of making any, unless he makes it by gambling; and I believe he is no more a Fitzurse than you or I."

"Janette knows that he hasn't much money; he hasn't deceived her about *that*. She doesn't mind."

"Much money? He hasn't any money."

"But he must have had money—some money?"

"He has only what Mrs. Pollen chooses to give him, and I don't believe she will give him much more. She is beginning to find him out; and, little as I like to do any fellow a bad turn, if I can help her to find him out I will. Don't you know that it was on his account little Vinnie tried to drown herself?"

"No; I didn't know that," Camiola said, with eyes of astonishment.

"No? and of course Janette didn't know it? And you didn't know, either of you, that the fellow was living on Mrs. Pollen's bounty?"

"But surely, now, Mr. Romont, even you must admit that there must be something good in him when Mrs. Pollen takes such an interest in him? Come, now, you will own that much?"

"Well, Mrs. Pollen is a dear, kind, noble-hearted creature—I found that out long ago. God bless her! But she makes mistakes, I suppose, like others. She thought this fellow was a sort of Claude Melnotte kept down by iron fortune, who only wanted a helping hand to become a hero and a genius, and all that. And then she has found out, I believe, that he is in some way or other related to her husband, and she wanted to make a man of this creature; but I think now she is beginning to give it up as a bad job."

"I am so glad I spoke to you, Mr. Romont. This is dreadful—much worse than I ever could have imagined; but I am all the more glad that I spoke to you. Janette must be saved, no matter by what means, come what will."

"She must be saved from him, if it has to be done by putting her into a strait-waistcoat. The thing is how to get at Mr. Lisle at once. Can you answer for her to-night?"

"If you think we are right in this, and I have no one near me to speak to about it but you"—she felt her cheek grow flame hot as she spoke the words—"I will keep her here by force if needs be until her father and mother come. You may depend upon that,

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Mr. Romont; and, thank Heaven, I am a good deal stronger than darling little Janette. I could carry her about like a child. I will send a letter to Lady Letitia."

"Yes; write it and give it to me. I will see Mr. Lisle if possible to-night; but if I can't, then the very first thing in the morning. He shall be here with Lady Letitia before you are all out of bed. You go and write the letter at once. Make it short—it can't be too short—and give it to me. We must have no talk and scandal in all this if we possibly can prevent it."

"Very well; I'll go and write. Will you come in?"

"No; I'll stay here. But you'll come back with the letter yourself?" he asked anxiously. "I told you I had something to say to you."

"Yes; I had forgotten that for the moment." She was embarrassed, although she had not the faintest idea of what he was going to tell her. She hurried away, but was not long gone. She came back with the letter in her hand. "Would you like to read it?" she asked. "I haven't sealed it."

"It will be all right, I am sure. I will seal it by-and-by. Now, Camiola, I have something to say to you."

She started at the sound of her name thus spoken by him. His voice was deep, and trembling with emotion. She was drawing back a little in a sort of alarm.

"I have something to say which is of the utmost importance to you and to me." He put his hand round her wrist and held it firmly, so that she could not get it away. Indeed, she did not try; she had no time to pay heed to anything but the words that were coming from him. What is he going to say? "And I shall not keep you in suspense; I'll come to the point. It is this—I love you, Camiola—and I know now—that you love me."

She gave a little cry and plucked her wrist from him. He did not hold it.

"Oh, for shame!" she said. "Mrs. Pollen told you!"

A rush of wild and almost fearful rapture went through him. She did not even attempt to deny it; only, "Mrs. Pollen told you." That was all; the truth was owned.

"I know it from better evidence than Mrs. Pollen could give," he said gravely. "She didn't tell me. I know it from your own eyes and your own lips, Camiola. I stood by and heard you in all but so many words acknowledge that you love me."

"Oh, but that is impossible! It is impossible; it can't be; it couldn't be. I haven't seen you for days and days."

"Yes you have; oh yes you have. Don't you remember Joseph, the Albanian boatman who rowed you on the river yesterday?"

"Yes, yes. What about him?"

"I am Joseph, the Albanian boatman."

"You!"

"Yes; look here!" He assumed one of the habitual attitudes

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of Joseph, folded his arms across his chest, and stood with eyes turned to the earth, and he spoke a few words in the queer Levantine Italian in which Mrs. Pollen and he used to interchange ideas. His face was dark against the sky, and the features were not clearly seen. He appeared for the moment just Joseph, the Albanian, once again.

Then Camiola remembered that when she broke into tears in Mrs. Pollen's music-room, as Mrs. Pollen pressed her with questions about Romont, the seeming Albanian started forward suddenly as if to come to her, and then drew back. She saw it all now.

"Camiola, my love, you will forgive me? You will forgive me for having found out this in such a way? You will remember how much depended on it for you and for me? If ever the means could justify the end they are justified for us in this. Think what our lives would have been if we had not known that we loved each other until it was all too late! Now it is not too late. Camiola, my love, speak to me."

Camiola had been standing mute and motionless as a statue while he spoke. There was silence yet for one moment, of unutterable pain to him, for he guessed the worst now.

"And you played that trick on me?" she said at last, in a voice of unnatural composure and coldness; "you stooped to play that trick, that unworthy trick, to get at a poor girl's secret? You disguised yourself to play the spy on me, although you knew that I was engaged to Georgie Lisle! You a man—a gentleman! Well, well, I think all the better of *him; he* would not have done that!"

"I love you," Romont said passionately; "I had a right to know whether you loved me or not. If I had found that you didn't, you would have had no trouble from me; I would never have come to obtrude my love on you. What matter how I came to guess, or to think, or to hope that you loved me? I did think that by making up as Joseph, the Albanian, I had a chance of finding out for certain whether you loved me or not. Was I to allow any scruple of that kind to keep me from knowing that? You can't marry Georgie Lisle—you shan't marry him. I love you, and you love me; and you belong to me, and you shall marry me. But I want you to forgive me first· I do, indeed, Camiola, Camiola." He entreated her in beseeching tones with tender repetition of her name.

"Good-bye," she said, turning away.

"For to-night?"

"For ever."

"But you can't mean that; you can't be serious. I haven't committed a crime."

"It seems to me very like a crime; a treachery, or a treason. I wonder was ever a poor girl so played upon before?"

"Oh, but this is folly, sheer folly," he said impatiently. "The one thing is that I love you. I fell in love with you the very first

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day I saw you; and now I have found out that you love me. For us two the rest is nothing."

"The rest is a great deal for me," she said sadly.

"Still you *do* love me?"

"I don't believe I do now—after that," she said. "At least, I will get over it. I will teach myself not to love—any—any one who could have played such a part as that. Oh, Mr. Romont," and the tears rushed to her eyes, "you were my hero and my ideal—my idol; and now you are not so any more. Oh! why did you do this?"

She put her hands over her eyes. He thought she was softened; he put his arm round her waist. She drew away.

"You will forgive me?" he said tenderly, imploringly, "after a little time, and when you come to think all this over? Your heart and your love will excuse me and plead for me. I'll spare you any more talk to-night; and I'll bring Mr. Lisle in the morning, and we'll save poor Janette. Good night."

She uncovered her face.

"Before you go," she said, "I ought to tell you what I mean to do. I will tell Georgie Lisle all this: he has a right to know. I will tell him that I was foolish enough to make a hero of you and—and—and, to—well, yes, to love you, and that you found it out, and know all about it. I'll not tell him how, if you don't like. I'll tell him, too, that I like him now better than I did before, and if he still wishes to marry me—well, he may. I will be his wife."

"Of course he will say yes," Romont said fiercely. "He knew quite well that you didn't love him; he knew it all along. He knew that you were only talked and pestered into engaging yourself to him—and what did he care so long as he could hold you to your promise? This makes no difference to *him*. What will it matter his knowing the name of the man you love? He knew there was some such man all the time. Camiola, you shall never marry him."

"If he will have me," she said, "I will marry him. Good-bye, Mr. Romont; it is all over. I thought you were so different! It seems to me as if I had lost you altogether now."

"Do you really think my offence is unpardonable? Is there to be no excuse and no forgiveness?"

"It isn't about the offence being unpardonable," she replied, with a wan smile; "but about the man not being the same, not being what one thought him. If I was in love it was with the Bertie Romont of my imagination, and not with you. That's all; and now, good night."

Love, anger, wild hope, cruel disappointment, were surging and raging in the young man's heart. She looked so lovely, so queenly, in her cold unpitying mood under the mocking and merciless lustre of the stars, he could not restrain his passion; he seized her in his strong, well-trained arms, and held her head down and kissed her lips again and again.

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"There," he said, releasing her, "I seal our engagement with these kisses, and bind you to be my wife! Go and talk of marrying Georgie Lisle after that!"

He rushed from the rectory back to Fitzurse House. His heart seemed bursting; but not from unhappiness. No; he even felt a certain wild elation. He did not give much heed to Camiola's parting words. "She loves me; she is mine; she will never marry him"—this was what he kept telling himself as he hurried along. He had to put restraint upon himself lest he should shout aloud in his excitement and astonish belated wayfarers.

The evening had been one of excitement so far, and there was more excitement to come of a kind he little expected. He was determined to go and see Mrs. Pollen at once—that very night. The hour was late for Fitzurseham, but it was not late for the West End and Mrs. Pollen. He wanted to tell her the result of their conspiracy so far; no doubt he wanted to be comforted and kept in heart by her, and he wanted also to consult her about Walter Fitzurse and Janette. But he could not go to see her at that hour of night as Albert Romont; he must become Albanian Joseph again for that night only. Mrs. Pollen's servant returning late to Mrs. Pollen's hotel, would excite the surprise of nobody. He always kept his Albanian make-up and the dye for his complexion ready at Fitzurse House. In a remarkably short space of time he was Joseph the Albanian again.

He could not find Pilgrim anywhere, and he wanted to speak to him before leaving. In the course of his quest he entered the music-room, where one faint light was burning. He observed that Mrs. Pollen's little casket of money was standing on one of the tables. He took it up half unconsciously; it was very heavy. He could not help thinking what a chance was here for any Fitzurseham thief or burglar if such person could only guess that the casket was made heavy by the weight of gold coin. To be sure, the thief or burglar would not be the possessor of one of Mrs. Pollen's keys, but he could manage to get the box open and become master of its secret and his treasure for all that. Strange that at such a moment and with such troubles of his own, Romont should think of all this; and yet he did find himself thinking that Mrs. Pollen was very incautious; that Fitzurse House was almost absolutely unprotected; that common report already described it as full of untold treasures; and that a midnight invasion of it was one of the likeliest things in such a region. He resolved to talk to Mrs. Pollen about that too. "If she will leave money and costly things here, she must have two or three men to sleep in the house."

Suddenly he heard a quiet and stealthy step on the gravel walk outside the music-room wall. Could it be Pilgrim coming back? No; the tread was too light; it was the tread of a young man, and at the same time it was too cautious and too creeping. Romont stood near the great curtain of pearl-grey plush which hung across the little door opening on the lawn, the little secret door for Mrs.

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Pollen and her particular friends, and for which each of the friends had a latch-key. He stood there and listened, and at the same time quietly felt for the revolver which he carried with him when he had on his Albanian dress. The step came glidingly up to the door. There was a pause; the person outside was apparently listening. Only one man, Romont thought; it can't be much of a put-up thing anyhow. Now, to his surprise, he heard a key put into the lock. It was, then, some one of Mrs. Pollen's particular friends coming to visit her house at that hour? Curious that, surely.

There was not much time for consideration. Romont drew back from the curtain. He stood at the table on which the casket was placed. The door was opened, and was carefully, quietly locked again; the heavy plush curtain was cautiously lifted, and Walter Fitzurse came into the room. The light was so faint that he had come close up to where Romont stood without seeing him. When he did see him he started back.

"Joseph!" he exclaimed.

"Signor," Joseph replied, standing in his usual statuesque quietness, with unmoved, unsurprised face. Then Walter began to explain in the most clear and elementary French he could summon up, suiting it as best he could to the level of Joseph's capacity for understanding foreign tongues, that he had come there to get a piece of music which Mrs. Pollen had promised him, and to write her a letter. He made signs illustrative of the movements of a person writing, to help Joseph further to a comprehension of his meaning. At last Joseph signified that he understood, and put pen, ink, and paper at Walter's disposal, making the light in that part of the room much stronger at the same time. Then he bowed respectfully, and silently left the room, and Walter was alone there.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION.

WHY had Walter Fitzurse come like a thief in the night to visit Fitzurse House?

He had really come upon a desperate errand. He had made all his arrangements to run away with Janette next morning or that night; he had his plans for their secret but safe marriage perfectly adjusted, and he had spent his last sovereign in completing them. Money he must have this night, get it how he would; and he had gone to Mrs. Pollen and asked her to lend him—he put it gracefully as a matter of loan—to lend him some money, and she had peremptorily refused him. She spoke to him in words of remonstrance, of generous anger, of reproach; but she would not give him the money except on conditions which he scornfully refused to accept. So he left her, in ungrateful anger and impatience.

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He tried to find Romont and could not; tried to get hold of this or that friend, but every one was out of town somewhere that summer Sunday, and there were few of his recent companions in any case who would lend any money to him or any one. Then, driven almost to despair, he remembered Mrs. Pollen's casket of gold coin to which he had a key, the key that also opened the particular door of the music-room. Why not take that money, and repay it after the marriage? Once he was safely married to Janette Lisle her people must do something for him; Mrs. Pollen herself, who now owned herself a connection of his through her late husband, must do something for him.

If Fitzurse had only trusted Mrs. Pollen, and confided in her from the beginning, no one can say what might not have happened. If he had come to her and told her that he loved Janette, and that Janette loved him, she would have given him money enough to begin married life with, and she would have made herself his ambassadress to the Lisles to ask for the hand of their daughter. Even if he had convinced her that such an embassy would be futile, and that rather than lose Janette he was determined to run away with her, and had appealed to Mrs. Pollen's generosity and sentiment to aid him in his Lochinvar enterprise, it is only too likely that Mrs. Pollen's delight in romantic emotion and in daring effort would have gained her over to his side. But Walter was one of those unlucky persons who are described as too clever by half. He trusted nothing to Mrs. Pollen, and thus it happened that his two love-stories came upon her at the one moment, and she knew that he had cast off poor Vinnie Lammas, and that he was endeavouring to induce Janette Lisle to leave her father's house. This was too much for her.

"My experiment has been a dead failure *there*," she said. "He is a cad, and that's all about *that*. I'll put Lady Letitia on her guard. No; I had better see him first and talk to him. Perhaps I can work upon his fears, and in that way get him to let Janette Lisle alone. Dear little girl! I like her all the better for her rubbish about equality, and her romance. But she must not be sacrificed to him. I must intervene. It is about time some one intervened, it would appear."

The intervention thus far had taken only the form of a strong remonstrance from Mrs. Pollen to Fitzurse. Camiola had once heard some of it, more than she was quite able to understand at the time. Mrs. Pollen had found out, through the inquiries she had been making, that Walter Fitzurse was not in any sense a member of the great Fitzurse family; and she had insisted on his making this known to Janette Lisle. Walter had promised that he would do this; not particularly clear as to his purpose to keep the promise, but quite satisfied that he could tell anything to Janette without endangering his hold on her affections. If he had to tell her anything it would be easy for him to say that he had only just made the sad discovery that he did not belong to the

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great family, and that the moment he discovered this he felt it his duty to tell her and to set her free of her engagement with him. He knew very well what would come of this; Janette would simply declare that she loved him better than ever. He knew well that he held a sure place in her heart no matter what family he belonged to. It was not clear to him that he had not made a mistake so far as she was concerned in not giving himself out at first as one of the picturesque race of the *proletaire*.

He left Mrs. Pollen's on this memorable Sunday in desperate mood—mood to risk anything. But he was by no means unhappy or even ill-satisfied; indeed, he was very proud of himself and of the part he was playing. He considered himself a highly interesting person. He was glad to think that Camiola now knew all about him; it greatly enhanced his self-satisfaction to think that this rich and beautiful girl was compelled to be in his confidence, and was positively afraid of him because of her friend. Meanwhile he had been living for some time in very good style, as he considered it, in London. He had got to know a few men of some position in society; some of them a little fast, but he did not mind about that. His name had been put up at one or two clubs; he was beginning to be well known to a certain circle in the West End. He was essentially a flexible plastic creature, and he took to this sort of thing as easily as if he had been used to it all his life. Perhaps if a profoundly sagacious social philosopher had been asked what was the principal secret of Walter's success in society, such society as it was, the answer might have been that it was to be found in his Heaven-bestowed gift of wearing good clothes well. It seemed to be obvious that a man on whom well-cut clothes looked so well must be a gentleman, and a sort of man to put up at one's club.

But a crisis in his fortunes had now come this Sunday, and it must be boldly met. He must get money, and he must get off with Janette Lisle and marry her. The money was to be had in Mrs. Pollen's casket; he would borrow it, and put it back after it had served his turn. At the worst, his taking it could be boldly acknowledged as a lover's stratagem when once he was married to Janette, and nothing would come of it. He made his way to Fitzurseham. He passed by the place where he had lodged; he passed under the windows of Mrs. Lammas's house, and saw that all was dark there. Vinnie, no doubt, was in bed long since. Was she thinking of him? he wondered. Very likely not; probably she had fallen in love with some one else. He hoped so—poor little thing! Strange that he could ever have fancied himself in love with her. She was looking limp and shabby, he thought, when he saw her at church that day. It was a great relief that all that silly old love-affair between him and her was over. He would tell Janette about it some day, and Janette would be very kind to the little girl.

He found himself at Fitzurse House. He went up to the front door and rang the bell. He meant to ask for Pilgrim. Pilgrim evidently was not at home. No one answered to the summons of

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the bell. That was all right. It was part of Walter's plan to go to the door and ask for Pilgrim in case any one should be in. He went away, but did not leave the grounds. He hung about for a while in one of the shrubberies, then crept to the door of the music-room and softly let himself in and closed the door behind him. He expected to find himself quite alone. The ordinary servants had no admission to that room unless when the door opening on the corridor was expressly unlocked to admit one of them. Walter went in, and was making promptly for the table on which stood the casket when he suddenly became aware of the presence of silent Joseph, the Albanian servant. This was indeed a surprise. Who could have counted on seeing him in that room at such a time? Fitzurse fell back at first and was inclined to give up his enterprise and escape from the place as quickly as possible. But it suddenly occurred to him that the destiny which he always believed to have made him its special charge had his interests still in its view when it sent the Albanian in his way. Who should say that it was not the Albanian who had taken the money, supposing its having been taken should be discovered; supposing Fitzurse himself should not be able to replace it before any discovery was made? To turn the opportunity to the best account Fitzurse must openly meet Joseph and speak with him. Then, if any unlucky chance should lead to premature discovery, Fitzurse could say that he had himself seen Joseph in the house and spoken with him on the very night. It would not be the act of the scion of a noble family, perhaps—he still insisted on being a Fitzurse to himself, let Mrs. Pollen say what she might—thus to allow a false accusation to prevail against a poor innocent foreign servant; but affairs were well-nigh desperate with him, and he could not stop for scruples. Of course it never should come to that, he thought. He would take care to replace the money in good time; but at the worst it was better a wretched Albanian should suffer disgrace than that the life-project of a Fitzurse should come to grief. After all, was it not extremely probable that the Albanian had no particularly good purpose in prowling about the music-room at that hour of the night?

So he got rid of Joseph, as we have seen. He did not venture to lock the corridor entrance behind the Albanian, and so shut him out. This, he thought, might look suspicious just then, although it was always done by Mrs. Pollen and her few initiated friends; for the charm of the music-room was that it was supposed to be cut off from all but the initiated, unless when the initiated chose, for any momentary purpose, to admit the uninitiated. But as Joseph had got in somehow, Walter thought it would not be safe to shut him out. He sat down, in the first instance, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Pollen, which he sealed and left for her; he would do everything as he said he was going to do it: and then, and then —he noiselessly opened the casket. He saw the money, and he stayed his hand a moment. It was not robbery he was bent on?

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No, surely not; his forehead grew hot at the idea. But it might come to look like it; it might be mistaken for such an act. Cold drops stood on his temples, his hands trembled, but he could not draw back. If he failed to get money by some means that night, all would be lost for him. He took two rouleaux of sovereigns out of the casket and thrust them into his pocket. Then he quietly locked the casket again. For good or ill the deed was done now.

He was about to ring for Joseph and call his attention to the letter for Mrs. Pollen, when he heard a key turn in the private door, and in a moment the door was opened. On the table near the casket a revolver was lying. It was Romont's revolver; he had left it carelessly there when he found that he had to deal with Walter Fitzurse only, and not with the Fitzurseham burglar. Fitzurse caught it up instinctively, and stood as if on his defence.

CHAPTER XXII.

STOOPING TO CONQUER.

"HULLO, Fitzurse! who could have expected to see you here at such a time as this? How are you?"

Fitzurse started and trembled; positively trembled, and felt his forehead bedewed with perspiration. There was Romont standing before him—Romont, whom he had believed to be far away; and if Romont had been one minute, half a minute, in the room, he must have seen what Fitzurse was doing. Romont was in walking dress, and carried his hat in his hand. He looked as if he had just come in. That was something of a relief to Walter's mind. So far as he knew, there was not another human creature in the house but himself and Joseph.

"Why, Romont? I did not know that you were in London. I never thought of seeing you here to-night." He put down the revolver. Romont observed the action.

"No, I don't suppose you did, and I never thought of seeing you here. I am always rushing about, backwards and forwards. Did you come to see Pilgrim, or Joseph, perhaps?"

"I came—yes, I came to see Pilgrim. I have something to say to him. I have been writing a letter to Mrs. Pollen."

"You didn't expect to see Joseph here, did you?"

"No, I didn't; I thought he was in town with Mrs. Pollen. Very odd, our all turning up in this way," Fitzurse said, with a desperate attempt at a laugh.

"Very odd; about the oddest thing I have known for a long time. I will tell you what I came for, Fitzurse, my good fellow; there's no mystery about it. I came to look after some money in this very room."

"Some money in this very room!" Fitzurse felt as if his heart was standing still. His throat was parched, his lips were dry.

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Could it be that he was found out; found out before he had time to make any profit by his deed? "Some money in this very room?" he gasped. "What do you mean, Romont? Is there any money of yours in this room?"

"No, not of mine; but of Mrs. Pollen's. She is very unwise in leaving money about in that sort of way. She told me that she had left it here in this thing; and I could not rest until I had gone to see that it was all right. I don't think money ought to be left about in that sort of way. It may be a temptation to some poor devil who otherwise might continue to be an honest man to the end of his life. I suppose it is temptation or no temptation that often makes all the difference between the honest man and the thief."

"I suppose so—I dare say. By the way, I wonder, Romont, what this Albanian fellow was doing in this room? Did Mrs. Pollen know that he was coming here? Did she send him for anything?"

"Why? what about Joseph?"

"Well, somehow I thought his manner was rather odd when I saw him here and spoke to him. He didn't seem to make it quite clear what he was doing."

"Oh, he didn't seem to make it quite clear what he was doing here, didn't he?"

"No; and he was in this room—this very room."

"Where you are now?" Romont said with emphasis.

"Where you and I are now, yes. Doesn't that seem rather odd? What could he have wanted here?"

"Do you mean to say, Fitzurse, that you suspect Joseph of being after this money that Mrs. Pollen left here?"

"Well, I don't know anything about him; he may be a very honest man for all I can tell; but still——"

"Exactly: 'what sall de honest man do in my closet?' What is the honest man doing in Mrs. Pollen's music-room, where the money is? But you see, Fitzurse, that would apply to you and me, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose there is some difference between you and me and a rascally Albanian servant."

"There is some difference, certainly," Romont said with slow deliberateness, "between Joseph and you; a very considerable difference. Between Joseph and me—well, I am not quite so sure as to that."

For the life of him Walter could not yet tell whether Romont did or did not suspect him. He was becoming desperate. He had a weapon near him; it was coming into his mind that he would have to use it. Better anything, any danger, any crime of blood, than to be found out in what he was doing. Even as the thought came up wildly, savagely in his mind, he felt that Romont's eye was following his every motion. While he was thinking of the revolver his hand had unconsciously moved towards it, and he saw

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Romont watching him; he could see even a faint smile of scorn on Romont's face.

At that moment Fitzurse felt himself a murderer in his heart. He was equal to murder now; things had gone with him at such a rush, with such a terrible descent. Better anything than be found out in what he had been doing. Better, a thousand times better, that Janette should believe him guilty of slaying than guilty of robbery. Suppose he were to kill Romont then and there, it would be easy to invent some story of a quarrel and an assault which, if it would not save him from the law, would save him from utter shame, and would still leave it in the power of Janette not to despise him. To do the unhappy creature justice, he was only thinking now of what Janette would say. All hope for himself was gone for the moment. The look with which Romont followed the motion of his right hand was a revelation to him. Romont knew all about his doings, and knew the very thought of murder that was in his mind. If he could kill Romont and put back the money in its place before Joseph returned—then let Fate do what she would, the worst would not be known; and Janette would not be utterly ashamed of him. The level floor seemed to rock and dance underneath him; there were strange noises whirring in his ears like the throbbing of machinery in movement; he must do something or faint. If he were to faint all would be lost. One moment and he would have played his card of despair; but he was interrupted by Romont's voice, which uttered, with the most perfect composure, the words—

"It's no use, Fitzurse; Joseph is outside. Don't you remember that? And besides, your hand is shaking; you couldn't hit a haystack. I should feel perfectly safe standing here, provided only that you promised to aim at me."

"What the devil do you mean?" Fitzurse asked fiercely. He took away his hand from the weapon which it was touching. He must brazen the thing out now. His courage and reason were coming back.

"Never mind what I mean; we understand each other. You are not used to this sort of thing, Fitzurse; your impulse was absurd. Well, you talked of Joseph; you seemed to suspect Joseph of being after this money. Now if you will just wait here a moment I'll see that Joseph does not leave the house, and then we'll search Mrs. Pollen's casket. I know exactly how much money was there. If a coin be missing we'll talk to Joseph about it. I'll leave you here just for a moment or two. You understand me, Fitzurse?" Romont spoke with a stern emphasis.

Yes, Fitzurse understood only too well. A last chance was given him. He was in Romont's power, and Romont knew all; but Romont would not betray him. He made good use of his moment alone. He put the money back and closed the casket once again. Romont returned a few seconds after the restoration had been accomplished.

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"Joseph is all right," he said. "I am sure you must have wronged him, Fitzurse; he doesn't seem in the slightest degree confused or put out. I dare say we shall find everything just as it ought to be. This is Mrs. Pollen's little money-box; the money ought to be here. Why, yes, there it is, of course—six little rouleaux, safe as can be. Poor Joseph! I am sure, Fitzurse, you are glad to see that the money is all right, and that there is no charge to be made against poor Joseph. You are glad of that?"

"Of course I am glad," Fitzurse said sullenly. "Well, I must be going."

"You will wait for Pilgrim, will you not?"

"No, I think not. It's getting late; and it does not much matter whether I see him to-night or not."

"Fitzurse," Romont said, coming up close to him and taking him by the arm, "we understand each other, don't we? I know perfectly well what you came here to do, and you know that I know it. I am giving you a chance; will you go away?"

Fitzurse flung himself free of Romont's hold.

"Away! where?"

"Well, anywhere out of England; America or Australia. A new country is a new career. Begin your life over again, and begin it on a better plan. So far as I am concerned, nobody shall ever know anything of this night's events. Will you promise to go?"

"I have no money. You know that well enough."

"You shall have money. You can take this money here to begin with. Nobody knows it is here but you and I——"

"And Mrs. Pollen?"

"I shall satisfy Mrs. Pollen without letting her know anything that we don't want her to know."

"There's Joseph," Fitzurse said doggedly. "*He* knows."

"Oh, Joseph—never mind Joseph. What I don't tell Joseph won't tell, I can promise you. Look here, Fitzurse, I wish to save you—I do indeed; and you are on the very edge of ruin. Pull yourself together; drop all this confounded nonsense about the Fitzurse family; call yourself by your own name—your father's name; go into a new country, and redeem yourself—and above all let that poor girl alone."

"What poor girl?"

"Janette Lisle. You couldn't surely think of allowing her to marry you now?"

Fitzurse thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and looked Romont for the first time straight in the face.

"I tell you what, Mr. Romont, this is going a little too far. Because you take it into your head to fancy something or other about me—which may be mere imagination or invention, or I don't care what—you presume to go on as if you were my master, and I your slave. I'll not stand being ordered about by you; I'll not be bullied by you. I can manage my own affairs."

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"Do you really mean to say that you would make that young lady your wife, after what has happened?"

"If I go to America, or Australia, or anywhere else, I shall take her with me as my wife."

"Before you leave this place," Romont said, "you must promise me to give up Miss Lisle, or I will go at once to her father and her brother and denounce you as a thief. No, you shan't get out of this just yet." Romont turned to lock the door. Fitzurse had become half mad with rage and shame and fear—fear of exposure. He was reminded of the last desperate chance again. He clutched the revolver and fired a shot at Romont, whose back was turned to him. But it was as Romont had said, his hand was trembling, his aim was all abroad, the bullet went into the door twelve good inches away from its mark. Fitzurse was a good shot at a shooting match, but he had had no practice of shots fired in anger. Before he could fire again Romont literally flung himself on his assailant and seized his right hand. Romont was much stronger, especially in the wrists and arms. He was always quite cool and collected, his physical resources as well as his mental were always at call. The very suddenness of his dash at Fitzurse was the result of instant calculation and not mere instinct or impulse. Fitzurse felt the revolver torn from his hand with such a sudden wrench that it seemed to him as if his wrist and every one of his fingers must have been dislocated by the strain. Then Romont flung him away, and he staggered back against the wall. He recovered himself and looked wildly round the room for any manner of weapon. Romont understood him.

"No use now," Romont coolly said. "You are covered by the revolver, don't you see? I have been out West a good deal, and I am used to this sort of thing. For you, Fitzurse—or whatever your name is—I must say that you don't seem any better hand at murder than you are at robbery."

Fitzurse flung himself down into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"You can do as you like," he said, without looking up. "Shoot me if you will, I don't care—now." And the unfortunate young man, whom the rapid and hideous descent of a few short hours had brought so deep down into unforeseen crime, burst into mere hysterical weeping. Suddenly he looked up, and with a face distorted by tears and agony, he said in a choking voice—

"I'll do anything; I'll promise anything—if only—if only you won't tell Miss Lisle?"

Romont put the revolver carelessly on a table. He knew there was no further need to be on his guard against Fitzurse. He quite understood now the man he had to deal with. Fitzurse was only the half-insane victim of his own vanity and ambition; he was neither a deliberate thief nor a determined bravo.

"I give you my word of honour, I swear to you, Fitzurse, that I will never tell any human being of anything that has happened

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here between us, if only you will promise to give up that girl. I am just as willing and just as anxious to save you as I was before, and I don't believe that you are wholly lost; no, not a bit of it. I will be your friend even yet, if you will allow me. You will let that girl alone?"

"What can I say to her? How can I get out of it? She likes me; she is fond of me; she is indeed. What shall I say to her? We were to have gone off together to-night or to-morrow morning."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Romont, "I have been only just in time."

"Giving her up I give up everything; what do I care about my life any more? No; I can't give her up—I won't give her up."

"My good fellow, don't you see that you must give her up?—don't you see that after what has happened I must interfere and tell her father and her brother if you don't promise me? I shall have to call in Pilgrim and Joseph—yes, and Joseph; and to send for the police and give you into custody on a charge of attempted robbery and murder. Joseph saw you take out the gold; he was watching you all the time. I know how you put it back; and I saw you attempt the murder. You will spend this evening in prison, and will probably only come out of prison to go into penal servitude. These are the hard realities of your position. You must see that Miss Lisle is not likely to marry a convicted felon. That is one side of the case. Now look at the other. I offer you freedom, my absolute silence about all this, and a full chance to you to redeem yourself and start a new and honourable career in some other country. You shall have money and every fair chance. I don't suppose a strict moralist would approve of what I am doing; but I don't mind. I think that with all your vanity and your nonsense you have some good in you still, and, moralist or no moralist, I give you another chance. Will you take it? Come."

"What can I say to her? What shall I say to her?" the wretched young man feebly moaned.

"Well, you can say something like this—you can say that you know now her father and mother would never approve of the marriage, and you can say that you have found that you have not as much money or as good prospects as you expected, and that you do not think it right to her to drag her into poverty, and exile, and a quarrel with her family all at once; and that out of your very love for her—for I take it for granted, Fitzurse, that you *do* love her; you are not bad enough to have been merely deceiving her?—out of your very love for her you think it better to go away and leave her. Write something like that, and she will understand it in the right way, and think all the more of you. Then she will remember you always in a kindly sort of way, and you will always be a hero to her—even when she has married some one whom her father and mother like, and is happy. By Heaven, Fitzurse, if I were you that is what I should do, and I should be glad to have spared the girl from misery, and saved up for myself a kindly memory in her heart for ever."

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"I suppose you are right," Fitzurse said sullenly. "At all events, you are in a position to dictate terms, and I have put myself into a position which gives you the right to dictate them. There is only one way out for me, and that is through the door you offer to open. I ought to thank you, Romont; and I do see that you have acted very generously, and I shall be better able to feel in the right way by-and-by perhaps; but you have knocked down my castle of cards with a pretty rough hand. You have spoilt my game just as I was on the very point of winning it, and I am afraid I can't be quite as grateful as I ought to be for your generosity in letting me off—just yet."

"I don't mind," said Romont; "I am doing my best. I am thinking more about the girl than about you. You accept my terms?—that is the main point."

"I must; I have no choice. It's a little hard on me, isn't it—that a man should lose love and ambition and everything—even London—all at once, and have to be grateful for it too?"

"I don't ask you to be grateful," Romont said sternly; "and I don't see much opening for ambition in the way you were going, and I am not quite certain whether you were in love with Janette Lisle or only with yourself. But I am glad you have made up your mind."

"One word more," Fitzurse said hastily, as he saw that Romont was about to bring the dialogue to an end. "You won't do things by halves—I believe that much of you. For the few days that I shall have to prepare for going away, wherever I am to go, you will not seem to have cut me? You will not keep away from me? That would make people suspect."

"I will behave," said Romont, "exactly as if you were my closest friend. I will help you in all your preparations; I will see you off; I will be among the last to shake your hand and wish you good luck as you go."

For a moment Fitzurse was really touched. Through the sevenfold hide of vanity and selfish egotism and mean ambition, shallow artifice and small cynicism, the simple manhood of Romont's nature pierced his heart. "If I were to begin again," he thought, "I should like—I should try—to be like that. Well, I am to begin again; I am to have another chance."

"Shall we wait for Pilgrim?" Romont suddenly said. "He is sure to be here in good time. We can tell him that you are going away. He may have some advice to give us. He knows a lot of things, Pilgrim does."

"No, I don't want to see Pilgrim," Walter said hastily. "I don't want Pilgrim to have anything to do with my affairs."

"We wouldn't tell him anything except just that you were determined to go abroad somewhere."

"I don't want Pilgrim," Walter repeated. He was afraid that Pilgrim would bring up the story of Vinnie Lammas, which Walter was not anxious to be reminded of just then. He little appreciated

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the chivalrous forbearance of Pilgrim. Even to Romont, Pilgrim had not told Vinnie's story except in the most rapid outline, and he had made no charge against Fitzurse other than the statement that he was not lately so fond of the girl as she was of him. What Pilgrim did not know of his own knowledge he never would tell as a fact.

Romont agreed that Pilgrim should not be taken into confidence. He understood the compact with Fitzurse to be complete, and that was what he was anxious about. There was no further talk of writing or signing anything. Walter left Fitzurse House at midnight, having with him more of the gold than he had himself taken out of Mrs. Pollen's treasure casket in the first instance, and having given Romont his promise to meet him at five o'clock the following afternoon at Romont's lodgings.

Fitzurse passed out of the music-room into the night. He turned for a moment and looked back upon the house he was leaving. He must have felt humbled and crushed if he had ever allowed genuine feeling to live in his heart at all. But he never had done this; he had made his life a piece of acting even to himself. As he looked back on the old hall he was not an impostor with a false name, going out disgraced into exile, pledged as the sole condition of his safety to give up the girl who loved him. No; he felt himself a hero of romance, the last of the proud race of Fitzurse—driven, indeed, by overmastering destiny from the home of his ancestors, but still intrepid and self-sustained, still resolute to strive against fate—a very Fitzurse to the end. Perhaps no writer of fiction has had the courage yet to sound fully the deeps of self-deception and self-delusion which are to be found in certain egotistic natures.

Walter left the house, then, not crushed and humbled, but, on the contrary, rather elate and full of new purpose. There was a possibility occurring to him which had not been thought of, certainly had not been talked of, when he made his compact with Romont. Suppose Janette Lisle should refuse to take advantage of his self-sacrifice? Suppose she should declare that she preferred his love to any other earthly consideration? Suppose she would not take back her freedom? Suppose she were to insist on becoming his wife? What was he to do then? Could his compact with Romont hold under such conditions? Could any man be expected to insist upon renouncing the hand of the girl he loved, and who loved him, if she, resolved not to be outdone in generosity and affection, were to declare that she would not be renounced? There was something comforting, something hopeful in these thoughts. Suppose Janette Lisle did, then, insist on being his wife, with what splendid *éclat* would they not go out to America together—the young hero who had carried off the British earl's granddaughter! In anticipation he saw the delighted society of the new world flinging open its gorgeous saloons to welcome him and his bride. The tempting thought came in his mind, "If this should happen, if Janette will not give me up, I have the money; destiny itself has placed

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it in my hands through the hands of my enemy. We can get away."

When Christian Pilgrim came back from his purposeless wanderings he found Romont standing on the lawn near the outer door of the music-room, smoking a cigar. There was a certain look of exaltation, if not even exultation, on Romont's face, and when he spoke he spoke like a man in high spirits. Pilgrim was surprised to see him still there; but it was generally understood that no one was to be much surprised at any of the goings and comings of the principal frequenters of Fitzurse House. Romont had a letter in his hand.

"Look here, Pilgrim," he said, "my brave companion in Humane Society competition, I particularly want this letter to be taken up to the rectory at once. I would take it myself but for reasons."

"I'll take it, of course, Mr. Romont. For Mr. Lisle?"

"No; for Miss Sabine."

Pilgrim drew back a little.

"You don't want me to see her?" he asked.

"No, not necessary. But I want it to be quite certain that she gets the letter to-night. She won't have gone to bed yet, I should think; but if she has, you can have it given to her maid or some one, and make it clear that Miss Sabine is to get it at once. She must read it to-night. I'll wait until you come back; I want to have some talk with you."

Pilgrim took the letter and went his way. He felt sure it was a love-letter from Romont to Miss Sabine. "Why not?" he asked himself. "Who could help loving her? who could be a fitter lover for her?"

This, however, was all the letter contained:—

"Don't expect Mr. Lisle in the morning; I have not seen him or sent him any message. There is no necessity now. I am sure it is all right. Don't say anything to her; she is quite safe now."

Romont did not say a word about his love. It would have been unworthy, he thought, to take such advantage of a letter which was to tell her that he had succeeded in saving her friend. He wanted her love, but did not want to have any ray of it merely refracted from her sudden gratitude. "She does love me," he thought. "I can wait."

Pilgrim came back and told him he had given the letter to a servant. Miss Sabine was still up and would get it.

"I saw Walter Fitzurse in the grounds," he said.

"In the grounds here?"

"No; up at the rectory. He didn't see me, I think—he didn't want to see me, perhaps—but I saw him; he was behind one of the trees. Perhaps he wanted to know something about Vinnie."

"I shouldn't think it was that," said Romont. "I don't suppose he knows anything about what has happened."

"I hope not; I shouldn't like him to know; it would only make him more vain than he is. He would take a pleasure in the

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thought that a pretty girl had tried to drown herself on that account."

"He isn't thinking about her now, I am sure," Romont said.

"He was there, anyhow."

Romont remained silent a moment, a little anxious. Then his looks cleared.

"I know—I see. Poor fellow, he has gone to take a last look; that is what I should do if I were he. In that way I am in thorough sympathy with the goings on of the ghosts, Pilgrim. I should make a first-class ghost; I should like to be always haunting the places where I had felt anything, happiness or not. Walter Fitzurse is doing the ghost business to-night." In his heart Romont felt compassion for the fallen and ruined young man, and thought the better of him because he had stolen away to haunt the spot where his lost love was hidden. A pang of generous pity went through him.

He told Pilgrim nothing about Walter. After an hour or two of talk Romont started to walk home alone. After all the excitement of the day a long lonely walk would suit him. Faint streaks of dawn kept showing in the sky as he passed the Old Ferry Inn. There was an unwonted air of life and activity in the house for such an hour; there were lights moving about in the rooms here and there. In the river just in front of the hostelry a small steam yacht was lying. Her steam was up, and she was evidently about to start. A boat was made fast to the steps of the old inn. Romont stopped for a moment and looked at the steamer, and wondered who owned her, and what she was going to do; then glanced at the water, thought of the poor girl he had rescued from it only a few hours ago, and went his way.

He reached his home tired, proud, and on the whole happy in the thought that he had been able to do something which Camiola would be glad to hear of; and he slept well and had sweet dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LETTER FROM YON POOR GIRL.

THE quiet sunshine made even the dreariest parts of Fitzurseham look glad on the morning after poor Vinnie's distracted plunge and fortunate, well-planned rescue. The waves that lapped the shore, now bare for a long stretch under the churchyard wall, seemed too gentle and too sunny to have harm in them for any human creature. The very chimneys of the rectory seemed asleep, like the houses in Wordsworth's exquisite poem. Yet there had been some sleepless eyes in the rectory that night. There were some of the inmates of the place who had not gone to bed; and some who, when they did go to bed, were not able to find much sleep there. Mrs. Lammas had not gone to bed at all; she had remained up to see after Vinnie and spare any other person the trouble of

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seeing after her. Two other of the ordinary inmates of the place had not gone to bed any more than Mrs. Lammas, but for different reasons. Camiola had gone to bed, but had not succeeded in getting much sleep. The capacity, however, of some girls for doing without sleep is a marvel never to be wondered at enough by mere men, and Camiola was up in the morning as fresh as if she had been enjoying hours upon hours of unbroken slumber.

One of those whom the rectory now sheltered had at least slept well herself, although the cause of sleeplessness to at least one other. The heroine of last night's little tragi-comedy woke about ten o'clock. Vinnie Lammas's first sensation when she opened her eyes was one of exquisite refreshment, the consciousness of relief and rest. She had been well cared for, and, wearied out by excitement and sheer physical exhaustion, had slept for hours and hours. She allowed her still sleepy eyes to wander languidly with a vague curiosity around the large and handsome room, and was dimly conscious of a feeling of pleasure at finding herself in a sleeping chamber so different from that which she was in the habit of occupying. The handsome furniture, the cornices, the curtains, the book-shelves, and the pictures—fancy, real pictures in a bedroom!—were objects of languid admiration and slowly unfolding interest. The sight, however, of these unfamiliar objects brought her before long to the recollection of the reasons why she found herself among them; and then suddenly Vinnie turned shame-stricken in her bed, and buried her face in the bedclothes. Oh! now she remembered it all. She saw herself again standing on the wall of the churchyard, heard once more the cry that came from her lips, and felt all the horror of that wild plunge and the fall which seemed to her to be down from the very sky. She felt the water giving way beneath her plunging feet that strained instinctively, vainly, for a foothold, and she seemed to be sinking down, down, down,—and what happened after that for a long time she did not know.

The sensation that now she felt most strongly was one of mere shame. She had been taken out of the water by somebody and brought here to the rectory—and oh! what a scandal and what a talk. And who had found her, and how was she brought here? Of course it must have been a man, or men, who had pulled her out of the water—and she hardly dared to think of the humiliation of the whole event, with all its possible conditions. To be dragged out of the river with her clothes all soaking rags about her, and brought here to this strange grand house by strange men; how shocking! And if not by strange men, by men who knew her and knew of her; how much more shocking still! Never could she bear to look in the face of any man who had helped to pull her out of the water and bring her here. Why, why, had she ever done such a thing? What were her sufferings, what were any sufferings she could have had to endure, compared with the shame and scandal and misery of last night's wretched work? While she

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was thus racking herself on the torture-bed of repentance and humiliation, she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder, and heard her mother's voice. Vinnie hid her childlike face in her mother's bosom, and the two women had a long cry together.

After this Vinnie felt a little better, and gradually could talk to her mother and tell her part of the story, and have such of the story as she did not know told to her bit by bit. It was Mr. Romont who saved her, she was told; and she buried her head in the clothes again. She felt so much ashamed. It was Mr. Pilgrim who brought her in his arms to the rectory. Mr. Pilgrim was with Mr. Romont at the time. Oh! well, she felt relieved; she did not so much mind dear old Mr. Pilgrim. He was always very good to her, and he was an old man, quite an old man; it was a great relief to find that it was he who had the carrying of her in his arms. She could almost smile at that. Was her mamma sure, was she quite sure, that it was Mr. Pilgrim who carried her? Oh yes; Mrs. Lammas was quite sure about that. Vinnie had Mr. Pilgrim's coat wrapped about her, and Mr. Romont's too; and Vinnie began to redden a little again at the thought of Mr. Romont wrapping his coat about her.

Then there came a gentle tapping at the door, and Miss Sabine entered. She sat by Vinnie's side, and talked to her very kindly and tenderly; not treating her as a penitent and a sinner at all; making no allusion, in fact, to what had happened, taking all that as for granted, and only concerning herself about Vinnie's present condition, and whether she would like to get up, and what she would like to eat and drink, and making frequent appeals to Mrs. Lammas, as if that respectable woman were the greatest authority and at the same time the closest personal friend with whom Miss Sabine could take counsel. It was all—"Don't you think so, Mrs. Lammas?" or, "As you were saying last night, Mrs. Lammas," or, "Your mother and I were thinking, Vinnie, that it would be well;" and so forth in the same way.

Vinnie was a good deal pleased in her secret heart to find that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia and Mr. Georgie were not at the rectory just then. She hoped to get clear of the place before they returned. The poor little girl fancied she would be lectured and preached at and rebuked if Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were there, and she dreaded such a performance.

While Camiola was talking with Mrs. Lammas and Vinnie, a tap was heard at the door.

"Oh, it's Janette; come in, Janette dear," Camiola called. But it was not Janette; it was only Camiola's maid; and Camiola appeared to be surprised and anxious about something, and went out of the room.

Camiola had troubles enough of her own, as we have said already. Was it because of the difference between the nature of man and the nature of woman—the man more selfish, the woman less so—that Romont felt happy while Camiola felt unhappy? Or

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was it because in this instance the man's stronger and more self-asserting character made him see difficulties conquered where he saw difficulties at all? The bare thought that Camiola loved him was enough to make Romont happy. Full of that thought, he had no place for fears or doubts. He felt sure that all would come right. Camiola saw nothing but difficulty and renunciation before her. She was positively pledged to Georgie Lisle; it was almost the same thing as if she were married to him. How was this to be got over? "It could not be got over," she thought; there was nothing but misery for Romont and her unless the time should come when Romont could have unlearned his love and forgotten her, and then he might be happy, whatever her case. But somehow she doubted if such a time would come. The very feeling of pride in Romont's love which would keep swelling up in her breast every now and then she forced herself to repress as if it were a sin.

Certainly Romont's short letter of the Sunday night had brought her great comfort. At least poor Janette was safe for the present; safe until her father and mother came back; and then, she hoped, safe for ever. Camiola could not guess how this had been brought about; but Romont said it was so, and that was enough. She had full faith in his power to do anything on which he set his heart, and she felt overflowing with gratitude to him. "Oh, I may be grateful to him," she said to herself; "there cannot be anything wrong in *that*."

Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were to return this evening. Camiola expected to see Georgie earlier in the day. She was determined that she must tell Georgie the truth about herself and Romont. It would be cruelly unfair to him, she told herself, to let him marry her without telling him that she loved another man, and that the other man knew it. If after this he was willing to marry her—why, then she would have to marry him. Oh! how in her secret heart she longed to think it possible that Georgie might refuse to marry her! But she could not think it. She was sadly in accord with Romont in this; Georgie was so enfeebled and cowed by his absurd love for her that he would marry her on no matter what conditions. The very conviction which she entertained was only another evidence that she neither esteemed nor loved him. "Oh, I almost despise him!" was the cry of her wounded heart. "I am going to marry him, and I almost despise him." Amid her other troubles she dreaded the coming scene with poor Georgie.

Janette was late this morning; but Janette was not usually a very early riser. Janette loved to nestle long in her bed, even on summer mornings. Camiola sometimes went to call her, and, going into her room, found her coiled up fast asleep long after the rest of the family had been busy in one occupation or another. As they two had the place to themselves this morning, Camiola thought she would let Janette have a more than ordinary indulgence. Still it was now nearly eleven o'clock, and that was rather too late, even

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for Janette. Camiola thought she would go upstairs and call the girl herself, so that Janette's extra indulgence in sleep might not be too much observed. Janette was not in her bedroom. Camiola rang for Janette's maid. Another servant came after Camiola had rung more than once, and said that Miss Lisle's maid did not seem to be anywhere about. Had she seen Miss Lisle? No; she had not seen Miss Lisle that morning. Camiola's heart sank within her. She asked no more questions, but went herself all through the house and over the gardens and saw no Janette. Still it was surely quite possible that Janette might have gone out without telling her. Such a thing had never happened before, that she could recollect, but it might happen without needing any special explanation. "I must wait a little; she will come back in a few moments," Camiola said. It must have been the alarms and excitements of the night before that made Camiola so absurdly nervous. She reassured herself by saying this. How ridiculous her fears and suspicions would seem when dear Janette came in! She was standing bare-headed in the sunny garden, and she had Romont's letter in her hand. She was re-reading it, to encourage and satisfy herself about Janette; for that and no other reason, no doubt; at least, she would not have acknowledged to herself that there could be any other reason. One of the servants came out of the house and came towards her; Camiola hastily folded up the little letter and put it into the front of her dress.

"Please, miss, the young person and her mother are going, and they would like to speak to you, please."

"What young person, Sarah? Do you mean Miss Lammas?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then if you mean Miss Lammas, Sarah, why don't you say Miss Lammas?" Camiola asked, adapting to her purpose the words of Sydney Smith concerning Moses.

Sarah only muttered something about not knowing why, and in her heart was indignant at the idea of her having to describe old Mrs. Lammas's daughter, the girl who'd been a-drowning of herself, as Miss Lammas. "Miss," indeed! However, she did not venture to contest the point, for Camiola, with all her sweetness and her kind heart, was not by any means a young woman to stand much nonsense. Camiola sent for Mrs. and Miss Lammas at once.

"Why must you go?" she asked. "I wish you could stay until Lady Letitia and Mr. Lisle come back; they would both like to see you."

"You are very kind, miss," Mrs. Lammas said, "and we've given you ever so much trouble; and I think we ought to go away now; and I have to go: but I thought you would like to hear that Vinnie is so sorry for what she has been trying to do, and she says she will never attempt it again; and—and, don't you, Vinnie?"

"Oh no, I am sure she won't," Camiola interrupted; "I know she won't; but we must not worry her, Mrs. Lammas, and I wouldn't say anything more about it, if I were you. I should like

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Vinnie—may I call you Vinnie?—to stay here with me until Lady Letitia comes back; it will be only this afternoon; I am sure Lady Letitia would like to see her—and I can promise you she won't preach to you, Vinnie; that's not her way at all; she is ever so nice with girls; oh, so nice and sweet; I can tell you we have often tried her patience in this house, we three girls. You would like to talk to her, I know, and she would like to talk to you. Won't you stay with me?"

Now, if Camiola had ended this little speech by simply saying, "Won't you stay?" the chances are that Vinnie would not have stayed. But there was something irresistible about the appeal, "Won't you stay with me?" There was something in the words which established a sistership, a companionship, and to poor Vinnie's broken spirit was unspeakably touching and winning.

"Oh yes, I'll stay—if you like," she began, and broke down into tears, which she vainly tried to stop or to hide.

"There, there, Vinnie dear," her mother said soothingly, and with the alarmed air of one who thinks it highly improper for a girl of Vinnie's class to cry before a grand, rich young lady.

"Then come with me, Vinnie, and we'll take a turn together in the garden. Very well, Mrs. Lammas; if you must go I'll take charge of Vinnie, and she shall be sent home, too, safely in good time."

Camiola saw in a sort of instinctive way that the one great thing for Vinnie now would be to restore her to her self-respect, and to let her see that she was quite free to make a new start unharmed by anything that had happened. The best stratagem she saw available for that purpose was to keep Vinnie to dine with the family that evening, and to make Georgie be very attentive to her, and to treat her just like any ordinary guest. This was not very subtle, perhaps, but it was the best Camiola could think of just then. Perhaps if Vinnie clung closely to Camiola, Camiola had in her heart a reason for being glad just then to cling to Vinnie. The presence of Vinnie would of necessity put off that inevitable explanation and scene with Georgie perhaps for another whole day; and even that delay would be something. Camiola would not put it off for herself or of her own accord; but if, because of the presence of a stranger, it had to be put off, then she could not help feeling a somewhat cowardly throb of gladness, or at least a sense of relief.

The two young women walked up and down under the trees, talking of various things. Camiola had set herself to the task of drawing Vinnie out on subjects not connected with her disappointment and her sad history; and Camiola seldom failed in drawing out any one man or woman whom she took in hand.

"But you must call me Camiola," she suddenly said.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Vinnie pleaded.

"Why not, Vinnie? You'll have to do it; why shouldn't you? We are only two girls."

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"Yes; but I am such a poor, miserable, insignificant, ignorant little creature; and you are so clever, and so rich, and so grand, and all that—oh, well, so splendid every way."

"Nonsense; it's no merit of mine if I have money; and my people were humble people. I don't really quite know how my uncle got the money he left to me; it was in trade of some sort, I know, somewhere out in South America; and oh! how often I wish he had never got it, so far as I am concerned!" For from some words that Romont had spoken to her in his passionate entreatings of the night before, Camiola had got the idea that he would have approached her with his love-declaration before she had ever engaged herself to Georgie, if it were not for her fortune, and his unwillingness to seem as if he were looking out for money.

"Oh, I think it must be such happiness to have a great deal of money, Miss Sabine," Vinnie sighed. If she were a rich girl, her lover, she thought, would never have forsaken her.

"'Miss Sabine?' Vinnie; Mind—Camiola."

"Oh! I couldn't; or well, if you do wish it—there—Camiola," Vinnie said, bringing out the soft pretty name in stammering, pathetic, loving accents, and looking very sweet and fearful and clinging as she spoke.

"That's right, Vinnie," Camiola said, kissing the pale cheek; "we shall always be good friends, you and I."

The pale cheek got a little glow of colour under the kiss and the kindly words, and Vinnie felt that there could not be ever again in life for her the temptation or the despair which could make her do anything to displease Camiola Sabine. Camiola had never studied the way of bringing sinners to repentance; but if poor little Vinnie's one mad burst of despair made her a sinner, then most assuredly Camiola had found the way to bring her to repentance. Where is the moralist or philosopher of any kind who shall estimate for us the amount of good that might be done, or evil averted, by a sisterly kiss given at the right time?

The day was running on, and Janette had not presented herself. Camiola was growing more and more uneasy, more and more anxious to assure herself that there could not be any ground for uneasiness. That Janette could have gone away seemed almost impossible, after what Camiola had heard from Romont. That she could have gone away without a word of explanation or farewell to Camiola appeared absolutely impossible. Yet Camiola could hardly listen sometimes to what Vinnie was saying, although she could not on any account have seemed inattentive. She did not quite know how the subject came up, but she heard Vinnie saying—

"You see it is so different, miss—I mean Camiola; it is so different with poor girls brought up like me. It's no fault of my poor mother. She had to work so hard for herself and for me that she couldn't be always looking after me; and that's the way with ever so many girls; and so we get ways of our own, and we are women before our time. It's so different with well-brought up

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young ladies—like Miss Lisle, now. They are never left to themselves; they are always sheltered from the world, and looked after, and cared for; and they don't follow every foolish impulse; their home is all in all to them."

And just at that moment a servant came up and put a letter into Camiola's hand, and Camiola saw that it was in Janette Lisle's writing. Yes, it was from Janette, and it bore the Charing Cross post-mark; and before she had time to open it Camiola knew only too well the news it was to tell her.

This is what Janette wrote:—

"MY OWN DEAREST CAMIOLA,

"Don't be very, very angry with me. Walter and I are going to be married. We could not live without each other, and he thought it best to make our marriage certain before we told my father and mother of our love and our resolve. Please tell them, Camiola dear; and tell them the moment I am married I will write to them and explain all and ask their pardon. I should like you to tell them this, for you can put things so well, and they have such confidence in you. I wish I could ask you to say you think we are right in what we are doing; but I suppose that would be too much to ask—would it? Only I do hope that you don't think us very wrong. I am going to be so happy with him—and he is so noble, so disinterested, so self-sacrificing; he wanted me to give him up at the last moment because he is poor and cannot prove his descent from a noble family—as if that was not just another reason why I should cling to him and love him! You may be angry with me, Camiola, but you will understand me.

"Good-bye, dearest, for the present. With fondest love from your

"JANETTE."

Camiola had not thought that anything could have made her very glad to see Georgie Lisle home again that day. But now as she was reading the letter she saw him coming, and she positively ran to him.

"Oh, Georgie dear, I am so glad you have come; I am so glad anybody has come. Read that letter from Janette! And Lady Letitia not here!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"STILL THOU'RT MY DAUGHTER."

IN all her distress and dismay Camiola could not keep from expressing some surprise at the way in which Georgie took the news. He broke out at once into peevish complaint over what he called Janette's selfishness. "She thought of no one's feelings," he exclaimed, "but her own. Just because she happened to fall in love with this fellow, or to fancy she was in love with him, she must

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sacrifice everybody and everything to her own whim. Girls are all like that, I do believe," he said.

"Are not men a little like that sometimes?" Camiola could not help asking him with some emphasis. The emphasis was lost on him.

"Of course I didn't mean a girl like you, Camiola." This was true. Complaints against girls in general usually include one's sisters, but it is a different thing as to one's sweetheart.

"Doesn't matter," said Camiola sententiously. "The question is now, what can be done?"

"I don't see what we can do anyhow; Janette doesn't give any address."

"Not likely she would, under the circumstances." Camiola could not keep from being somewhat curt and scornful in her answers to her lover. Then she remembered Vinnie Lammas, who had withdrawn to a respectful distance, and was looking the living picture of embarrassment. "Georgie, you remember Miss Lammas?"

"How do, Miss Lammas?" was Georgie's brief tribute to the social usages. He might be excused if he found Miss Lammas a little in the way just then, and he knew nothing about the event which made her a special object of interest and sympathy. It may be observed perhaps, in passing, that merely virtuous conduct seldom makes any one much an object of interest and sympathy. We are far from wishing to bear too harshly on poor Vinnie because of her wild attempt to drown herself; but it is certain that the mere fact of her having been the sole comfort of her mother, if she were so, would not have induced even our sweet, pure-hearted Camiola to take so much trouble about her. Camiola, too, saw that Vinnie would be rather in the way just now; and there were peculiar and personal reasons why the deserted girl should not be a listener to any of the family discussions which were soon to set in. She turned to the girl with her frank and kindly way.

"Vinnie, something has happened here—you will have to hear all about it soon enough, I dare say; and perhaps it will show you that things don't always go quite so smoothly in houses like this; but you would not care to be here just now, I know. You will come again. I will walk with you to your house; yes, I will; I wish it. I'll just go and put on my hat. Georgie, I am going to walk with Miss Lammas to her house; I shall be back in a few minutes—there really is nothing you and I can do just now," she said to him in a low tone. "We must wait until Lady Letitia comes; and the news concerns this poor girl more than you would be likely to think, perhaps. I shall manage to break it to her as we go along. It is easier for us to bear after all, Georgie, than for her."

Camiola had two motives in determining to walk with Vinnie Lammas to her home. One motive was purely unselfish; the other, it must be owned, was selfish; not darksomely or wickedly so, but

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still a prompting of self. Her good motive was a desire to be seen walking through Fitzurseham in open day with Vinnie Lammas. Some whisper about Vinnie's escapade would undoubtedly get about the place, and it would be ever so much to Vinnie's advantage if she were to be seen walking through the streets of Fitzurseham with one of the "ladies of the rectory," the very morning after the breath of scandal began to blow. Credulity itself would ask for further proof of scandal after that. Cynicism itself would hesitate to believe the worst of a girl who had been seen to be on friendly terms with one of the ladies of the rectory. The other motive which influenced Miss Sabine was that by going with Vinnie she might escape a *tête-à-tête* with Georgie.

As she walked with Vinnie all through Fitzurseham, along highways and byways, on central thoroughfares and devious tracks, going entirely out of the direct road to Vinnie's house, and making, in fact, a regular promenade, she told Vinnie the whole story about Janette, and got much of Vinnie's confidence in turn. They met old Jethro Merridew, who took off his hat to Camiola, and made her a bow of grand antique formality, and they passed many acquaintances of Vinnie's, who stopped and looked after her, amazed to see her in such company. Camiola went in and had a talk with Mrs. Lammas, and left the mother and daughter in happier mood than they had known for some time.

Meanwhile Camiola could not help feeling a sort of admiration and something like awe when she thought of Janette's action. Janette, the dear little creature whom she had always petted and fondled like a child, to have suddenly done this deed of daring love, to have made herself the heroine of an adventure fit for the wildest romance! To think that an enterprise should have been undertaken in the real life of the present day such as Camiola had always believed was now regarded as too wild even for a novel; and that little Janette should have been one of the two performers in it! Come what would, Camiola resolved that she at least would stand by the girl who was ready to brave all for her love and her lover. Perhaps in her heart Camiola heard some faint, soon-repressed whisper of a wish that she, too, were away with her lover.

When she returned to the house she found herself ranging through the rooms vacuously, in the sort of way in which one ranges idly through the rooms which were tenanted lately by one whom the coffin has borne away never to return there any more. What was it, indeed, but a sort of burial? The young Janette, whom she had loved and fondled for years, was gone for ever. The girlish days were over. Janette had a lover now and a husband, and the friendships were done with. So, at least, Camiola felt; not wholly unselfish, perhaps. Who can be wholly unselfish at such a time? There are jealousies of friendship as irrepressible, although not so keen and bitter, as those of love; and Camiola could not keep down the thought that Janette was lost to her.

The hours at last brought Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia. To them

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the shock was at first absolutely overwhelming. It seemed incredible, impossible, that such a thing could have happened in that peaceful, well-ordered household. Lady Letitia set herself in her bewilderment the useless task of hunting through all the rooms of the house to see if Janette was not somewhere there. Even Camiola's words, even Janette's own letter, brought for a while no conviction with them. "Oh, it couldn't be; it is impossible!" was all that Lady Letitia could say. Janette run away from her home —from her father and mother—with Mr. Fitzurse; it was absurd. Nothing of the kind could have happened; there must be a mistake or madness or something somewhere. Even Mr. Lisle was for a long time unable to admit the thing as a fact to his mind. After a while, when their minds began to settle themselves down to a recognition of the cruel truth that the girl had gone, it was curious to notice with what different expression the admission gave itself out. Georgie Lisle was merely impatient and fretful; he was angry with Janette for bringing all this confounded nuisance on them, and for coming between him and his enjoyment of his own love projects. Lady Letitia was inclined to be merely angry. Mr. Lisle was much more grieved and shocked than angry. He soon recovered his outward composure. He decided that nothing was to be done for the present; that no search was to be made, no scandal-stirring inquiries set on foot.

"You had your suspicions, you say, Camiola?" Lady Letitia turned upon our hapless heroine. "You guessed that this was going on; you say you did. Why on earth did you not tell me?"

"I only guessed it yesterday," poor Camiola pleaded, feeling rather guilty.

"Why didn't you tell me yesterday?"

"But you weren't here."

"You might have sent for me. There are servants, there are carriages, there are hansom cabs. Why didn't you send?"

"I had a reason. I thought I had a good reason. I felt sure that nothing would happen before you came back."

"*I* knew it all along," little Alice exclaimed in triumph. "I gave you lots of hints, mamma, but you wouldn't take them. You were only angry with me."

"You run away, Alice, there's a good little girl," Georgie said. "You go play somewhere; you are not particularly wanted here just now."

Alice shrugged her shoulders and did not go.

"What was your reason, Camiola," Mr. Lisle asked, "for thinking nothing would happen until we came back? I dare say it was a good reason. But can't you tell us what it was?"

"I can't—not just yet, at least. Of course you will hear it, but I couldn't explain it now. It was a good reason, Mr. Lisle. I was sure Janette was safe."

"All these mysteries!" Lady Letitia exclaimed impatiently. "Everybody, it appears, knew something about this horrible plot

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but just the girl's father and mother. No one thought it worth while telling them anything. Well, well!" She shrugged her shoulders in protest against all the world. There are some very good women who can only find relief in trouble by the conviction that some one not immediately concerned is to blame for what has happened, and might have prevented it.

"I ought to have sent for you last night, no matter how late," Camiola said. "Of course I know that now. But I didn't know it then; and you would not blame me if you had the same reason that I had—well, that I thought I had."

"Did you hear something—from some one?" Lady Letitia asked.

"I did; something which made me believe Janette was safe."

"Did you hear it from him—from that man—from the man who has carried her off?"

"Oh no; not from him."

"From Janette herself?"

"No, Lady Letitia."

"In Heaven's name, from whom then, Camiola?"

"I mustn't tell you, dear; it does not concern me only; of course you will know; very soon, I dare say; but I can't tell you anything now."

"Do let her alone, Letitia," Mr. Lisle said. "What is the use of cross-examining her? She says she has good reason, and I dare say she has."

"Thank you, dear Mr. Lisle," Camiola said, her eyes filling with tears.

All this made Georgie very unquiet and impatient. He did not like the idea of Camiola having secrets. "Was any one here yesterday, Camiola?" he asked, with trembling lips and jealous, suspecting eyes.

"Lots of people were here," little Alice cried. "Mr. Romont was here late last night, and Mr. Pilgrim, and Vinnie Lammas, and Mrs. Lammas; Vinnie Lammas was brought in drowned."

"Drowned!" the Rector, his wife, and Georgie exclaimed in one breath, all turning bewildered eyes on Camiola.

"Oh! she wasn't drowned," Camiola hastened to explain. "She is quite well; I have just seen her home—she fell into the river."

"She threw herself into the river," Alice said viciously.

"Well, well; she is not dead, anyhow," Mr. Lisle said, "and we need not go into that just now."

It was clear to the mind of every one that the secret Camiola was keeping had something to do with Romont. Georgie's cheeks grew red.

"You didn't say that Romont was here, Camiola?" he stammered.

"Mr. Romont and Mr. Pilgrim brought Vinnie," Camiola explained. "It was Mr. Romont who saved her from being drowned."

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"I think the world appears to have been turning upside-down yesterday while we were away," Lady Letitia observed.

"Well, in the mean time," Mr. Lisle interposed, "we must think about Janette." He was beginning to weary of what appeared to him likely to become a purposeless wrangle, or little better. "We have to take things as they are. We can't prevent the marriage now, and even if we could it would be wrong for us to do. We must make the best of it, and have as little scandal as possible." It was indeed new for Mr. Lisle to admit the possibility of scandal of any kind connected with his household. "Of course, when this poor child comes back to us with her husband, we must welcome her—and him. We must take him as her husband."

"Could you receive him, St. George?" Lady Letitia passionately exclaimed. "Oh, I don't believe I could receive him, or even her."

In her anger Lady Letitia thought most of the daughter's disobedience and mutiny. Mr. Lisle thought most of the beloved child's distrust of her father and mother, and of her deceit.

"Oh, of course you must receive her and him," Camiola struck in with spirit. "Dear, darling little Janette! It was very wrong of her and foolish—why didn't she trust any one?—but what has she done that you shouldn't receive her? Yes, and her husband for her sake. He is very clever, and he is handsome and gentlemanlike, and I suppose he was afraid you would never give your consent; and oh, they were lovers, after all! Dearest Lady Letitia, of course you will receive her and him; do you think I don't know you?"

"Certainly; yes, we must receive them," the Rector said decisively; and he knew quite well that whatever his wife might say in her anger she would think with him when she allowed her heart and her judgment to take counsel together. "We must do all we can for him—for Janette's husband. They will be poor."

"Janette shan't be very poor. That's certain," Camiola said. "Not while I have anything. She has been more than a sister to me, and I shall soon be twenty-one—and, please God, Janette shan't be poor—not if I know it." She put her handkerchief to her eyes, for tears of genuine delight were filling them. At last she found that there was some good in being a girl with a fortune. The words about her coming of age were flung with a sort of loving defiance at the heads of Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia. They meant to say, "I know you would try to prevent me from sharing my money with Janette, because you are proud, and you think she ought to be proud—too proud to take it; but I shall be of age soon, and then I'll do as I like; and just see if my darling Janette will refuse a sister's gift!"

Camiola had to turn away; she could not keep down her tears.

Lady Letitia went to the girl and took her in her arms and kissed her. "You dear, darling, good girl," she said, and all her anger melted away. "You have been the best of daughters to me, and I love you, Camiola."

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The two women remained clasped in each other's arms, both feeling much happier than they had felt a moment before.

"Nobody cares about me," sensitive little Alice exclaimed, bursting into tears and running out of the room.

"Let everything go on as usual, Letitia," Mr. Lisle said. "We will have dinner just at the usual hour. Come with me, Georgie; I want to talk to you."

They left Lady Letitia and Camiola together, and it was not long before these two were conspiring together about the manner in which a welcome was to be given to darling Janette when she came back.

"Poor Georgie!" Lady Letitia said, with a sigh; "I am glad he is happy, at all events. There is one of the family at least on whom everything smiles."

Camiola felt her heart sink within her; but she said nothing.

Soon after she went into Mr. Lisle's study. She was one of the few privileged beings who were always allowed to go in there. She wanted to say something more to the Rector. She found him with his head bent over his desk. He did not hear her. She went up to him; he had one hand over his eyes, and Camiola saw that tears, actual tears, were on his cheeks. Be sure Mr. Lisle was not thus moved because his daughter had married a man without money or social position. He was not thus moved even because his daughter had married without his consent and against his will. Mr. Lisle had a magnanimous spirit and a brave, independent heart. What touched him to the quick was the thought that his Janette, his darling child, whom he had loved and indulged and confided in since she could call him father, had shown so little trust in him that she would not even wait to ask him "yes or no" before she chose a husband for herself. He always thought she loved and trusted him, and one day there comes a young man of whom she knew nothing, and he asks her to marry him and go away with him; and she goes, and will not even wait to ask her father for a word of approval or advice. It was this thought that wounded Mr. Lisle's heart and unsealed the fountain of his tears. Camiola understood him by a kind of instinct. Yielding to another instinct, she stooped down, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him.

Mr. Lisle looked up. "Thank you, my dear," he said; "you are a good girl. I was very fond of *her*."

"You will be very fond of her again; you are very fond of her now," Camiola said.

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CHAPTER XXV.

A VERY SMALL DINNER-PARTY.

ROMONT slept long and late that Monday morning, tired out with the various excitements of the busy and adventurous Sunday night. His moments of gradual awaking were filled with some sweet, dreamlike sensation of happiness, such as men sometimes feel when consciousness is beginning to send its first soft light through the curtains of sleep, and which sets them to question themselves as they grow more and more wakeful, "What has happened to me, what is going to happen that makes me feel so glad?" The vague scent of a flower, some light breath of the morning air, is perhaps the only cause of the joyous sensation, and the disappointed mortal has soon to confess to himself that there is no particular reason why he should awake in gladness that day more than any other. But Romont had some distinct inspiration for his waking mood this morning; his first clear thought became a memory of the fact that he had kissed Camiola, and so bound her to be his wife, and that, happen what would in the mean time, this would be the end.

Then came the gradual growing recollection that all was not well as yet; that there were difficulties to be got over, the path to cross which it was not yet possible to see. Soon, too, came the remembrance of the strange scene with Walter Fitzurse and the compact in which it ended. Romont felt sincerely sorry that Walter had turned out so badly. He was sorry for Janette, with her child's heart and her enthusiasm; he was sorry that it had fallen to his lot to be the instrument to destroy her first romance of love. But he could not doubt that this was right to do; it would be a crime on the part of any one who knew what he knew to let the girl link her fate to that of one so destitute of all moral fibre and manly principle as Fitzurse had shown himself. To prevent such a marriage, however, was all that had to be done. It consoled Romont, and made him glad to think that it was still allowed to him to help Fitzurse to retrieve himself and strike out some new and honourable and successful path in life. Romont had no feeling but one of compassion and commiseration towards the unfortunate young man. The fact that Fitzurse had tried to kill him in the most treacherous fashion hardly now remained in his memory, and it certainly did not interfere in any way with his determination to help Fitzurse to become a better man. Romont was quite conscious of his peculiarity of careless toleration in this regard; he entered boldly into a recognition of it, and analyzed it and questioned it. "Of course I ought to help him—that's clear; but I ought to have to do so in spite of my hatred for his character and his acts; and I don't feel any particular force of moral indignation swelling up in me any more than I should in the case of a badly trained, vicious

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horse. It isn't good-nature in me, I am sure of that; I am afraid it is a moral pulpiness of character, a want of moral strength; but I hope it is partly because I am so much in love with Camiola that I have no room left for any other strong feeling of any kind."

The day wore on. Romont had not for a long time spent a day of such absolute lounging idleness. He turned over old books, and enjoyed a glimpse, now here, now there, into this literature and that. He was nothing of a scholar, but he loved books, and was able to read in several literatures in an easy, unscholastic, unpretentious sort of way, satisfying his own love of varied reading, and not inviting challenge or criticism. He had already been able to discover that Camiola, too, was very fond of books, although she hardly ever talked of them, or gave her friends to understand that she was a woman who read. He enjoyed much these hours of what might have been called enforced idleness. The enforced idleness came of a strong belief on his part that some one would send for him that day; Mrs. Pollen, or some one at the rectory—perhaps even Camiola herself—and that he had better not be out of the way; and in the evening, as we know, he expected to see Walter Fitzurse.

The evening came; five o'clock came, the appointed hour; but Walter Fitzurse did not come. At first this gave Romont no particular concern. Fitzurse was not likely to be a punctual man in any case, and he must have had many things to see to that day, and might well have been thrown out of time. Still, as the appointed hour came to be left long behind, Romont began to feel anxious.

Seven o'clock! Two hours after the time! What could have happened?

He heard a knock at his chamber's outer door. "At last!" he thought, as he stood up. But his man came in and only handed him a letter. It was from Mrs. Pollen, and this is what it contained:—

"Come to me at once, my dear friend. I want to see you. Put aside anything else you have in hand, and come. It doesn't directly concern either you or me; so come."

Romont lost no time in answering the call. He left a message to be given to Fitzurse, if Fitzurse should appear, and he went round to Mrs. Pollen's hotel. It was only a few minutes off. Mrs. Pollen lived very quietly. Romont was shown into her sitting-room, a small front room with a dining-room opening out at the back. The dividing doors were partly open, and Romont could see that a waiter was laying the table for dinner. Mrs. Pollen's maid was with her when Romont was shown in.

"So glad you have come," Mrs. Pollen said, "but I knew you would. You are always so kind. I am glad you were sensible enough to take my hint and not dress. I told *him* not to dress."

"I am expected to dinner, then," Romont thought, "and *he* is not to dress. I wonder who on earth *he* is?" Romont had already,

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in fact, a dinner engagement, but he had thrown it over, sent an excuse, not feeling by any means in the mood for dinner-parties, and not knowing what might turn up. He was free to take Mrs. Pollen at her word, and he knew that she had some purpose in everything she said or did.

"When I am told not to dress I obey," Romont said, "although it sometimes doesn't mean what it says. In your case I know it would; and anyhow I am always determined to take your instructions literally."

"About this Australian mutton," Mrs. Pollen observed; "it gives me a great deal of trouble, don't you know?"

"Australian mutton? Yes; I should think it would; it is excellent, I am told."

"Just as good as any English mutton, and so cheap! But here is the difficulty. The butchers in a place like Fitzurseham won't keep it, or rather they do keep it, but they won't admit that they do."

"No? Just like them."

"Yes; they sell it as English mutton, and get the price of English mutton for it. Now, what I want to do is to get the people in Fitzurseham to start some kind of co-operative store for the sale of butchers' meat. We could buy the Australian mutton in any quantity in the great London markets—Leadenhall, you know, and that sort of place—and retail it to ourselves in Fitzurseham at about half what we pay for our own mutton. What do you think of that idea? Does it seem practicable?"

"Practicable? Why not? Of course it is practicable. What difficulty could there be?"

"Well, the getting these people to stir themselves to anything like co-operation—to anything, in fact. They would rather pay double price all their lives long than make any serious effort to get a better condition of things. Of course, I could start a butcher's shop of my own in Fitzurseham, and retail the Australian mutton there, and have good cheap bacon, and all that; but then that isn't quite what I want to get at. I want to get them to rouse themselves, and learn the way of helping themselves, and doing things for themselves. I wonder if *he* can really give us any practical advice?"

"I should think he ought to be able to put us in the way," Romont confidently asserted, not having the remotest idea as to who the expected counsellor might be, and wondering whether it would prove to be some phœnix of butchers—some butcher of unique disinterestedness and public spirit.

Mrs. Pollen's maid was busy all the time arranging things on the tables and on the chimney-piece. Mrs. Pollen sent her out of the room for something, and the waiter had left the dining-room for the moment. She and Romont were alone.

"You know what has happened?" Mrs. Pollen suddenly said, letting the Australian meat subject go.

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"I don't know of anything."

"No? Not about Janette Lisle? She's gone off with Walter Fitzurse; married to him before this, I dare say."

"It can't be; it's impossible!"

Romont jumped up.

"Impossible, if you like; but it is true all the same. I have a letter from Camiola Sabine; I sent for you the moment I got it.—Well, whether he can help us or not, I don't feel inclined to wait dinner any longer for him. We shall not put off dinner for the other gentleman, Adolphe. Serve it when it is ready."

The waiter, it need hardly be said, had returned to the dining-room.

"*Bien*, madame," said the deferential Frenchman.

"Nobody is coming; nobody is expected," Mrs. Pollen said composedly, as the waiter again left the room. "The imaginary third person is a pious fraud of mine. It prevents any talk, don't you see? I don't want any one to suppose that you and I are in any sort of confederacy about this Lisle business; and I am not yet quite certain as to your part in it. So I wanted a good long talk with you; and I didn't see any better way of managing it than to order dinner for three, and let the third guest not put in an appearance, as he is pretty sure not to do, seeing that he has not been invited. Waiters get talking, one's maid gets talking, don't you see? When any one is listening, you and I can talk Australian mutton, about which I am quite in earnest all the same. But when we are alone I have other things to talk to you about."

Dinner was served, and they two sat down alone. The plate, napkin, and glasses for the third guest were allowed to remain, asserting the possibility that he might yet present himself. In the intervals, while the waiter was not in the room, Romont heard the whole story. Janette was gone—gone with Walter Fitzurse to be his wife.

"What I want to know," Mrs. Pollen asked, "is where he got the money? He came to me for money yesterday, and I would not give it to him. I guessed what he wanted it for; I had had my suspicions for a short time, and I would not listen to him. Now, when I got Camiola's letter it came into my mind that the young man might have talked you over. Did he?"

It would be idle to attempt to describe Romont's feelings when he heard that Walter Fitzurse and Janette had gone off together. At first he was absolutely unable to believe the story. When the conviction of its truth was forced upon him, he felt dazed for a while by the shock. He had never before been brought face to face with treachery and falsehood. He had never believed that such baseness was possible out of a melodrama or a romance. His various and practical studies of life had made him familiar with most of men's weaknesses, errors, and crimes; but here was something of which he had never had experience or suspicion. An educated, seemingly well-brought-up man, who had all the appear-

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ance and the ways of a gentleman, to be guilty of such double-dyed deliberate falsehood and treachery, was something of which he could have had no previous conception, and in the existence of which he would not have believed even now, if it were possible to disbelieve any longer. He might have felt ashamed of the manner in which he had allowed himself to be taken in, but he really could not assign any blame to himself for not having guessed at the possibility of such deceit. One might as well have expected, if he were handing in a cheque at the Bank of England, to be paid in flash notes. A man could not accuse himself of want of caution if he accepted a bundle of notes handed to him across the counter of the Bank of England without carefully examining them to make sure they were genuine. Just as reasonably might Romont have suspected that Walter Fitzurse was making a solemn engagement with the deliberate intention of breaking it.

"He did talk me over, sure enough," Romont said, after a long silence; "and I gave him the money, or rather *you* gave it to him by my hands. But he didn't talk me into any part in his plot; he cheated me, that's all." Then he told Mrs. Pollen the whole story, only leaving out any allusion to the attempt made upon his life, which, indeed, for the moment, Romont appeared to have forgotten.

"I have spoilt your dinner, I am afraid," she said.

"Not a bit. I'll pull myself together in a moment. Only for the first it rather takes one's breath away. So there are, then, real villains in actual life, not on the stage or in books!"

"Walter Fitzurse is on the stage, always on the stage, never off it; he is always play-acting to himself and for himself. I think he must be acting even in his sleep."

"You are right. I had some vague perception of that before. But to think that I should have been taken in by him, and should have given into his own hands the very means of carrying out his confounded plot!" Romont fell again into a deep silence.

Mrs. Pollen, too, remained silent for a moment. Then she said, nodding approvingly to him—

"Yes, that *is* the worst of it—I mean so far as you are concerned; that *is* the worst of it. You can't punish him in any way; you can't even expose him."

Romont looked surprised.

"I *was* thinking of that. But how did you know?"

"Shall I always have to explain the simplest things? I saw you clench your hand and pull your moustache, and, of course, I knew that you must be thinking of how you could have it out with him; and then I saw the expression of doubt and something like disappointment on your face, and surely it was no difficult matter to know that you first thought of punishing and exposing him, and then you remembered that if he is married to Janette Lisle you can't possibly do anything to disgrace and ruin the child's husband? Are there people so dull that they could not have followed the track of your thoughts, knowing what I know, and seeing what I saw?"

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"Well, that was what I was thinking of. We can't expose the scoundrel, if he is married to her."

"Of course we can't. If he had been 'slaughterman to all my kin,' as some one says in Shakespeare, I would let him go in peace and undiscovered, so far as I was concerned, rather than mar poor Janette's last chance of happiness. But I am so glad you see it in that light, too, my dear friend. Men are so wild and resentful and ferocious, so much of the brute or the savage in their natures, even the best of them sometimes, that I was afraid you would think of nothing but punishing him and exposing him."

"Oh, he be ———. I mean, what do I care about him? We must do all we can for her sake. God help her; I am afraid she will have a bad time with him."

"Well, anyhow, we'll not make her chances any the worse. If he can by any possibility retrieve himself, we shan't stand in the way. You are a good boy, Bertie; as I said to you once, your mother has spoilt you very nicely. Well, I think now you may turn to your dinner again. Don't you like your dinner?"

"Oh yes; I can eat anything."

"What a pretty compliment to my *cuisine!* What a charming little speech! Even the food I set before you you are able to eat!"

"Come, now, you know I didn't mean that."

"I shall only accept your explanation on condition that you prove in act that you really do appreciate the cookery of this little hotel. What do you think of the wine? Is it dry enough to suit your corrupted modern palate?"

"It is beyond praise."

And Romont drank the champagne in a way which made it clear that he did not fail to appreciate it. In truth, he was equal to a good deal of wine in his present condition of excitement.

"I am glad that you were not taken in by him in the sort of way I first imagined," Mrs. Pollen said. "I thought perhaps he had appealed to you as a lover yourself"—Romont winced—"as a lover yourself—why not?—to come to the rescue of another distraught lover."

"Oh, he doesn't know anything," Romont said hastily.

"My dear boy, you can't tell whether he knows or not. How do you know what Janette may have guessed and told him?"

"Janette doesn't know."

"Anyhow, I am glad you were not induced to make yourself an accomplice of his in that way. It is no discredit to any man to be taken in by a creature who gives his solemn word of honour and breaks it. Yes, I know you feel vexed because you were so easily taken in by him, but console yourself; I like you all the better because you were unsuspicious; and so would *she*, let me tell you, if she knew, and you were entirely wrong on that point. Don't believe for a moment longer that she would be angry with you for *that*. She will think as I do, believe me."

Romont made no answer. The truth is, that he was just thinking

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of what Camiola must have said when she found that his assurance of Janette's safety came to nothing, and what she would say when she found that he had been made the dupe of Walter Fitzurse.

"Now tell me about *her*," Mrs. Pollen asked.

"There's not much to tell. It is just as I expected. She is angry; she thinks I played an unworthy trick on her. She says she doesn't care about me—any more, at all events. She will marry that young cad."

"You think she will?"

"She says she will."

"I didn't ask you that. I didn't ask you what she said; I asked you what you think. Come, I know very well that you don't believe anything of the kind. There wasn't a bit of the look of the despairing lover about you to-day when you came in here. I didn't know anything about what had happened, but I saw no despondency about you. You are quite right. She will never marry him. Her reason will soon come to the rescue of her heart, and she will see that a woman can't be bound by the letter of a sham engagement against the spirit of a true one. That or something else will happen, and she will not marry him. All that I can see as clear as the day, and that is why I can't take your present condition as a lover too seriously. You love each other, and you will marry, and you will be happy; and in good truth I think you are well fitted for each other, and I begin to have a feeling of compassion for him—for that unfortunate boy, Georgie Lisle. Sacrifice some precious possession to the gods, my dear young man; you are having too much good fortune. As for him, the best thing he can do is to go back to the war and get either killed or cured there."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LOVERS' WALK.

THE rectory was a dreary abode for some days after Janette's disappearance. No one knew yet where she and Walter had gone, but it appeared quite certain that the steam yacht which lay off the Old Ferry Inn had been brought there for Walter, and had taken Janette and Janette's maid (who was clearly in the whole plot from the beginning) and Walter somewhere out of England—to the Scottish coast probably. There was nothing for it but to wait. Lady Letitia looked miserable; the Rector was very silent; Camiola felt like one guilty of complicity in Janette's flight. She tortured her mind in vain to find explanations for Romont's letter, and the false hopes it raised, and false security it gave her. She was thinking all the time what others would say of him if they knew what she knew, and, like her, knew no more; and she found herself defending him against imaginary assailants, and protesting that she was sure he had good reason for all he did. She found herself warming in his defence so dangerously that she tried to

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chill her advocacy by insisting to herself that there could be no explanation. All this did not help very satisfactorily to carry out the purpose which she told herself she had in view—to forget him. The effort to forget is in itself the renewal of the memory, it has been said, but there was something more in Camiola's case than the effort to forget. One cannot forget him whom we are forced to defend; one cannot be forgetting and defending at the same time.

"Let's get out of this place for a bit, Camiola," Georgie said to her one evening. "I'm tired of being shut in here. It's awfully dreary, don't you think? Let us go for a stroll along the river. It's very nice there."

It was a beautiful evening, about six o'clock, and there would be time for a long walk before dinner. The dinner was a dreadful ceremonial in these days; one needed to be strengthened for it by invigorating exercise and plenty of air. Camiola was glad to go out. She had been putting off the dreaded explanation with Georgie, and now she thought was the time to make it. It would not come to much, she felt only too sure. Georgie would never throw her over because of anything she had to say. Other men would in such a case, she believed and hoped, but Georgie was not one of these men. Still she felt softened to him lately. He was very dull and miserable these days, a sort of comrade in dulness and misery, and there was not much she could do to brighten life for him just at that moment. Indeed, it would not be quite the thing for any one in that household to seem happy while the father and mother were so much troubled.

"Mayn't I come too? I should like a walk," Alice asked.

Camiola was on the point of saying "Yes," when she remembered that the explanation could not come off if Alice were there to hear, and so she said nothing.

Georgie promptly put a stop to Alice's desire. "No, no, Alice: you can't come. You run away and play."

"I won't run away and play—and Camiola don't care for you one little bit, Georgie!" Alice piped in, with an utterly irrelevant assertion. "She don't care for you; she hates you. Oh yes, she does; I know it," the genial child persisted.

"That child is becoming insufferable," Georgie said, reddening to his ears. "It's a shame the way she is allowed to go on."

"She is sensitive and hot-tempered," Camiola said as they were going, "and she talks all sorts of wild fancies. But she has a very warm and loving heart, Georgie."

"Gad, I think she's like the rest of the family in that way. But you won't endorse what she said, Camiola?"

"Endorse what, Georgie?"

"What she said about you hating me, and all that!"

"Fancy my hating you! I have always been fond of you; as if you were my brother."

"Oh, come, I say; I don't want that, you know. I want you to love me, Camiola."

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"I do love you, Georgie; wisely, but not too well."

"That's something from Shakespeare," Georgie observed rather sullenly. He did not perceive her perversion of the words or the application she gave to her misquotation. This would have been the right time for explanation, but somehow Camiola could not get it just at that moment. Georgie looked much too like a cross schoolboy to be taken into serious counsel on a matter of grave meaning to two lives. So she put up some other subject.

She kept thinking all the time what a pity it was that Georgie was not in love with some other girl, and had her—Camiola—for a *confidante*. She would have been so glad to hear him tell of his love, and to encourage him, and help him, and contrive ways for him to meet the loved one; she would never be tired of hearing him pour out his soul, if it relieved him to do so; all that would be so delightful, and would make such a walk as this so happy for her. Why, oh! why hadn't he fallen in love with some other girl?

They talked of various things as they walked along. The path was now clear of the most outlying houses of Fitzurseham, and it was close to the river. They were walking in the direction of the river's source. Georgie began to talk of the probability of his soon having to return to Egypt, and this Camiola knew was always the prelude to an appeal to her to have their marriage hastened; and she did her best, therefore, to evade it or put it off. She felt terribly constrained with Georgie this evening; and had never before found him so small in nature, if such an expression may be used. If this sort of thing were to go on—if it were to be like this, she thought, "I should have to follow Janette's example in the end, and run away with—with some one."

As the thought passed through her mind Georgie had his eyes fixed on her face, where indeed they were usually fastened. He saw a sudden blush cover her cheeks. Camiola stood still for a moment and visibly trembled with emotion of some kind; and then she went quickly forward again. Looking before him now, Georgie saw that Romont was coming towards them. Romont was alone and walking slowly. He did not see them as soon as they saw him. In another moment they met, and they all stopped. Camiola felt for an instant uncertain whether they ought to stop or pass on; there could be nothing but embarrassment either way. But Romont stopped, and Georgie knew of no reason why they should not all be friendly, so far at least as forms and outward appearances went. He had never particularly liked Romont; he thought too many people liked him, and praised him, and made too much about him.

Camiola would not have liked to meet Romont then under any conditions; but she was particularly unwilling to meet him when she was in Georgie's company. She did not like him, of all men, to see her thus parcelled out and labelled as Georgie's future wife. She did not think Georgie showed to advantage in the presence of

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Romont. It came into her mind for the first time, and brought a sense of humiliation with it, that as they walked her lover was not quite so tall as she. She had never noticed this before, and now it vexed her.

Romont looked singularly handsome and manly in Camiola's eyes at that moment. She was becoming calm and composed, when she remembered their last meeting and his sudden kisses and his declaration that he had sealed their engagement, and she grew red again and glanced into Georgie's face as if she feared that he might have known what was passing in her mind. A few unmeaning words were spoken about the evening and the fine weather, and that sort of thing, then Romont said to her—

"I am afraid you must have greatly blamed me—about that letter I wrote to you. But I am not so much to blame as you may think. When I wrote I had the best reason to believe that all would be quite right."

"Oh! I am sure," she said.

"The worst of it is that I can't tell you all about it; I have an explanation to give, but I can't give it."

"Indeed, I don't want any; I am sure it was not your fault. I never had any doubt."

"Thank you ever so much; that is very kind of you; and like you. No; it wasn't my fault. I did it all for the best."

"I know," she said quietly. "I always knew."

Their eyes met for a moment—for such a moment! His look told of gratitude and a mind relieved; of love and confidence. Hers was appealing, pathetic; telling of a perplexed conscience and a troubled heart. "You have not blamed me; you have believed in me," was what his eyes said to her. "Oh, pity me and spare me!" was the appeal which her eyes made to him. Then he went on his way. Camiola longed to look after him, but dared not; at all events, would not. He turned and looked after them; sat on the wall that overhung the river, and kept his eyes on them until a turn in the road withdrew them from his sight.

"What was he talking about?" Georgie asked, after they had walked on a few paces. "What letter did he write to you, Camiola?"

"It was about—about dear Janette. Mr. Romont heard all about her, and Mr. Fitzurse, and what they meant to do—on that Sunday night—when you were away—when you were all away; and he had a hope that he could prevent them; and he sent me a few lines to tell me so; but he was not able to prevent them. I don't know why he thought he could, or why he couldn't, but I did not blame him. He was very kind; he meant all for the best."

"But what business had he to mix up in our affairs at all?"

"Well, there was no one else. You were away; your father and mother were away; even Mrs. Pollen wasn't here; and he came. He and Mr. Pilgrim brought in poor Vinnie Lammas, and

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I had no one else to speak to, and I told him; and afterwards he wrote to say that Janette would be all safe."

"So we owe it to him, then, that Janette has gone off with that scoundrel? If he hadn't interfered, you might have sent for father and mother. Isn't that so, Camiola?"

Camiola was made unusually meek by the inward conviction that between Romont and herself they had muddled things a good deal, and that if she had sent at once for Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia, Janette might have been kept from her mad enterprise. But she was much more concerned to vindicate Romont than herself.

"You don't understand, Georgie. It was very kind of Mr. Romont; it was mere kindness on his part; he had nothing to do with our affairs."

"Exactly; that's just what I say. He had nothing to do with our affairs; why did he meddle in them?"

"But he didn't meddle in them. I appealed to him for some advice when there was no other human creature near who could give me a word of advice. It was a very serious question, and I couldn't act without consulting somebody. All Mr. Romont did he did for the best. Besides, Georgie, I suppose nothing on earth could have hindered Janette; she had set her heart upon it. And, after all, she loves him—she adores him; we must remember that."

"I don't call that loving," Georgie broke out. "I call that being selfish, selfishness and nothing else."

"Most people are rather selfish, I believe, when they fancy that they are in love," Camiola said sadly. He thought she was applying the point of her words to him, but she was not; she was thinking of herself and finding fault with herself.

"Anyhow there would have been a chance of saving her only for him," Georgie said angrily. "The fact is, Romont and that fellow were great friends. I dare say the whole thing was a put-up job between them, and that is why Romont took you in, Camiola."

This was quite too much for Camiola's not altogether habitual meekness. There was anger in her eyes and her voice as she looked at him and spoke—

"You don't understand Mr. Romont, Georgie; you never liked him. If you knew anything of him you would know that he could not possibly act the part you talk of. He has no feeling for Mr. Fitzurse but dislike and contempt; and he is not a man to take in, as you call it, any woman."

"You seem to know all about him, Camiola. Does he let you into his confidence a great deal?"

"I gave him my confidence about that because I had no one else to confide in, and he acted like a friend, and like a man of honour, and I am greatly obliged to him. And there's something else, Georgie, that I must tell you. I have had it in my mind for some days to tell it to you. I feel that it must be told; it wouldn't be right of me to hide it from you."

"Camiola!" He stopped suddenly in his walk and stopped her

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and looked at her with flushing face and trembling lips. "Camiola! —I know—it's something about us—about our marriage."

"Oh! if he should faint again, and his wound reopen," she thought. But come what would, the thing had to be told out now.

"It's this, Georgie; it will pain you, I know; but I can't help it. I told you long ago that I wasn't in love with you—that I was very fond of you, but not in love——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that—I don't mind."

"And I told you also that I did love some one else—that I was in love with some one else."

"Yes, but I didn't believe it. Oh no, it wasn't true. It couldn't be true; and even if it were——"

"Well, it is true, Georgie, and this is what I have to tell you now. The man I am in love with is Mr. Romont."

"That man! I knew it!" Georgie exclaimed in an outburst of almost hysterical passion, forgetting in a moment how inconsistent this declaration was with what he had just been saying. "I knew it—I guessed it from the first. I knew no good could come of him and of his coming amongst us! But why do you tell me of this now, Camiola? What is the good of my knowing it?"

"It isn't the worst that has to be told, Georgie. The worst is that he knows it."

"He knows it—he knows it? He asked you—you told him? Oh, I can't believe it.'

"He didn't ask me, Georgie, and I didn't tell him—at least I didn't know that I was telling him, or telling any one. He was near and I didn't know it, and I suddenly gave way—and, oh, I can't explain to you how it happened; but he came to know it—and he does know it!"

"Has he asked you to break off with me—to throw me over; to put an end to our engagement?"

"He asked me to marry him. He said I ought to marry him."

"Well, what did you say?"

"I told him I was engaged to you; and that I couldn't break that engagement—if you wanted it kept up."

Then Camiola stopped in her words and waited for what was to happen. Apart from every other emotion, she felt a morbid curiosity to know what Georgie would say or do. So far as the reading of romances and plays and poems could tell her, anything, however wild and tragic, might possibly have happened. It was not off the cards that her lover might kill her first and then kill himself. Such things had been done, not merely in romance, but in commonplace real life. Such things were done every day. A week or two back, a young man, a delicate-looking youth, too—Camiola knew him well by sight—a shoemaker in Fitzurseham, had killed his sweetheart, stabbed her to the heart—it was by the river-side, too—merely because she acknowledged that she had taken a walk with another young man. Would Georgie try to kill

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her? Would he kill her? Would it not be strange, the sensation of being killed by one to whom she was like a sister for years, until just the other day? Did Georgie carry a weapon of any kind? Whatever happened in that way she would not resist. Let him kill her if he liked.

What did happen was something very different. Georgie caught her hand and raised it to his lips. "Oh! Camiola, how good and noble and true you are! You would not give me up; you would not break off our engagement; you would not throw me over. I love you, I adore you, more than ever!"

"Shall we turn back, Georgie, and walk home? It is time; they will be looking for us."

She spoke very coldly; her heart was chilled. This was worse than the killing. She would have liked him better if he had tried to kill her, instead of thus pouring out his senseless adoration. She was shocked by his unmanly refusal to see that she was held to him only by the link of a mere bondage.

"You are angry with me, Camiola, I know, but I can't help it —and I am so happy to feel certain that nothing can separate us."

"Then, Georgie, do you really tell me that you will marry me although I am in love with another man, and the other man knows it; that you will hold me to an engagement in spite of that?"

"I can't think of anything but that I love you—I couldn't live without you—I won't live without you! We can go away—anywhere you like, and live to ourselves—away from every one, if you like; but you must marry me. I won't live without you."

"Georgie," Camiola said gravely, "you make me begin to think that there is no wrong I could do to you or to me so great as the wrong of marrying you. I don't believe even that love like that would last. I take your own words; I don't call that love at all, but selfishness."

"Still you have given me your word—your solemn promise——"

"I will speak to Mr. Lisle," she said, "and Lady Letitia—I will tell them all."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RETURN OF THE FUGITIVES.

VINNIE LAMMAS was in the rare position of having the one great ambition of her life gratified. She was private secretary to a great lady, at all events to Mrs. Pollen, who appeared great enough in the eyes of the Fitzurseham folk, and who would have been made ever so much of by the West End of London, if only she had been willing to accept the West End's attentions. Vinnie came every day to Fitzurse House and wrote letters for Mrs. Pollen, or read to her, or walked or drove with her. She went home late in the evening, or at any hour, late or early, when Mrs. Pollen was returning to town; and Christian Pilgrim was sometimes sent to

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see her safely to her door. Mrs. Pollen never said a word to Vinnie about the plunge into the river.

Vinnie felt that her ambitious, long-familiar wish was granted, and that she ought to be happy. To do her justice, she tried hard to be happy. She made up her mind that she would get to be happy as fast as ever she could. Common gratitude to all who had been so kind to her called for that much effort on her part, she thought. She was glad to think that her mother was made happy by the position Vinnie had got, and by the improvement in Vinnie's health and spirits. Indeed, but for her own secret troubles, her disappointed love, her broken idol, her sense of penitence and shame for her one act of despondency and wildness, Vinnie must have been happy just now. Mrs. Pollen was one of the kindest, and at the same time one of the most interesting and original, of patronesses. Mr. Romont was in and out a good deal, and always talked to Vinnie in the most friendly way, quite as if she were a regular lady. Vinnie's sensations when she saw Mr. Romont for the first time after "that night" were such as she could never forget. She thought how dreadful she must have looked when he lifted her out of the water and carried her on shore; what a frightful dripping bundle of clothes she must have been; in what untold, unimaginable disorder! She wondered what he must have thought of her; she wondered she ever had the courage to look him in the face. But he was so kind and friendly, so easy in his manner and so respectful, that he put her quite at her ease, and she soon forgot all about it—except at moments, except at sudden awful moments when it would all come back upon her with a rush, and she felt tempted to run out of the room, or at all events to hide her face in her hands.

It was very interesting when Mr. Romont came in and sat with Mrs. Pollen and her, and perhaps had afternoon tea and talked about everything. What things he had seen and done; what places, what countries, he had been in! And Mrs. Pollen, too. Between them they appeared to have been everywhere in the world. Vinnie had never before been brought into acquaintanceship with a young man like Romont, who seemed to have absolutely nothing to do in the way of business, or of making a living. After so many years of poverty and hard work, seeing every one around her hard at work and nevertheless very poor, it was strange beyond comprehension or expression to Vinnie, to find herself the friendly companion of people who never thought about making money; only, as it looked to Vinnie, about spending it; who had no business of their own to do, but were constantly busy about the affairs of other people, trying to make them better and to keep them straight. Mrs. Pollen's absorbing interest in a scheme for a co-operative butcher's shop in Fitzurseham filled Vinnie with the uttermost wonder. To think of a great, rich lady like her actually making up her mind to start a butcher's shop of her own for the sake of selling good meat cheap to the dreadful, good-for-nothing, thankless

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people of Fitzurseham! And Mr. Romont, too, was going into the matter as seriously as if he had been brought up to the business from his infancy. Vinnie always had had an impression that people like that never knew of the existence of butchers and their shops, and if they had known would never have allowed one moment's thought to such low subjects. Then what things they talked of, Mrs. Pollen and Mr. Romont! What odd, clever things they both said! How funnily they chaffed one another! Vinnie did not always catch the point of their sayings quite in time; sometimes she broke into little spurts of laughter at the past joke which seemed, however, to come in as the proper tribute to the passing jest. They must be very happy, she thought; and why shouldn't they be, when they are so good and so kind and so rich? Romont, we know, was not rich, and he had his troubles, and he was not always by any means happy. But no hint of any trouble of his had got to Vinnie's ears, and to her he was as rich as Crœsus.

Camiola did not come to Fitzurse House these days; she wrote a line to Mrs. Pollen now and then, mostly to say that nothing yet had been heard from Janette. No one from the rectory came near the place. Lady Letitia in her heart blamed Mrs. Pollen for her patronage of Walter Fitzurse, and nourished a kind of acrid thought that, only for Mrs. Pollen, things might not have turned out as they did. Mrs. Pollen perhaps suspected the existence of some such feeling; and in any case would not have cared to intrude upon the Lisles just then. She thought she had better maintain for the present an attitude of neutrality. "I cannot say what side I may have to take yet," she thought, "if they hold out against Janette."

One or two evenings after the meeting on the river-side between Romont and Camiola, Mrs. Pollen, Vinnie, and Romont were on the lawn of Fitzurse House. Vinnie had a volume of Shakespeare in her hand, from which she had been reading to Mrs. Pollen, when Romont presented himself. Then Romont stretched himself on the grass, and Mrs. Pollen and he fell to talking in their usual discursory way, flinging ideas and epigrams and paradoxes at each other, during intervals of graver discussion on Australian mutton and the dwellings of the poor and the difficulty of keeping this Fitzursehamite sober and that Fitzursehamite's children at school.

"I have often wondered," Mrs. Pollen said, "what are the most pathetic words in Shakespeare."

"I have thought of that too," Romont said.

"I wonder what he has not thought of?" Vinnie asked her own mind as she looked discreetly but wonderingly at him.

"What is your idea?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"No; I would rather have yours first."

"Well, I wonder whether any words ever written or spoken could have more pathetic meaning in them than those about loving 'not wisely but too well'? Think what a picture of lost lives and lost feelings; of love destroying what it loved, and all out of very

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love—'not wisely but too well.' Think of that, and of all it calls up with it in one's mind!"

"Yes; but what do you say to 'Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home'?"

"That seems to me terrible," little Vinnie ventured to say, "if I understand it rightly."

"Camiola always stands out for it," Mrs. Pollen said quietly, "that nothing can exceed the pathos of Antony's words about 'the poor last'—'Until of many thousand kisses, the poor last I lay upon thy lips.' Come, what do you say to that?"

"Oh, but I think it is enough to bring tears into any one's eyes," Vinnie declared. She was becoming quite the poetic and Shakespearian scholar already.

Romont seemed distracted. He turned himself unquietly on the grass. "I shouldn't have thought she would fix on that," he said at last.

"Why not, dear youth?"

"There seems such an intensity of love and passion and pain in it; I didn't think women felt so much as that."

"When? How is it that? Do you mean women in general, or this particular woman?"

"Well, there seems a passionate depth in these words that somehow does not seem to me to be felt by women of a certain nature—Englishwomen especially. Some women seem to be rather lifted above that sort of emotion——"

"In fact you don't know anything about the matter."

"In fact I don't."

"Who on earth would have thought that a girl like Janette Lisle, brought up in that kind of way and in such a household, would have been so carried off by her love as to kick right over the traces and run away?"

"I always thought there was something a little hysterical about her," Romont said; "something not quite healthy; something rather undisciplined; apt to be mutinous if any chance should come."

"I begin to understand you now," Mrs. Pollen said, with a smile; "I didn't before. Yes; I see. She is an undisciplined little thing who runs away with her lover; but there are nobler and loftier creatures compact of purer fire and finer clay who would not condescend to do anything of the kind, and whose lovers are only all the more proud of them because they keep their love within the restriction of discipline! Exactly; you like the women not to show too much of that passionate depth of emotion and all that. My good youth, what an insular you are after all! But, I say, where have we left the Immortal Bard?"

Most of this was sheer mystery to Vinnie.

A letter was handed to Mrs. Pollen. She read it, glancing up even while she was reading, now at Romont and now at Vinnie. "This is from Miss Sabine," she said. "Our romantic wanderers have returned; at least, if they haven't returned they have given

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signal of their whereabouts; and they declare themselves ready to return. If all is forgiven they are willing to come back."

"Where do they write from?"

"From Bremen, of all places in the world."

"Of course; yes, I know," Romont said; "North German Lloyd steamers; they are ready to go out to America if they are not invited to return home."

"Precisely. The letter comes from Janette—from Mrs. Fitzurse—so Camiola tells me. They are married; ceremony took place in Scotland. Then they went at once to Bremen to be out of the way of all possible trouble by pursuit or otherwise; and if they are not asked to come back to England they will go to America, and call in the New World to redress the balance of the Old. That isn't Camiola's phrase, mind; nor Janette's; it's mine. I mean it's my quotation from Pitt or Canning or somebody, and I am rather proud of the application of it now. It was struck off on the spur of the moment. Oh dear, these romantic young lovers! I declare I admire her immensely, and I only wish I could admire him."

Romont had risen to his feet now, and Mrs. Pollen walked a few paces with him.

"That child takes it well," she said quietly, indicating Vinnie. "Every day will make her stronger now. It is the doubt and suspense that kill. I don't pity her so much any longer; but I feel rather distressed about poor Janette. Can he ever come to anything good, do you think?"

Romont shook his head. "I am afraid not; I don't see the root of any goodness in him."

"Well, of course you will say nothing. You won't interfere with whatever chance he has of retrieving himself? Mind, my friend—for Janette's sake!"

"Oh, God forbid!" Romont said fervently. "For her sake and her mother's I'll stand aside. If he can come to better things I'll not hinder him. The thing is done now."

"Would you like to have Camiola's letter? I'll give it to you if you would."

Romont looked eagerly at the little letter. His lover's impulse was at first to take it.

"No," he said after a moment; "it's not mine. What's the good? It's yours, Mrs. Pollen."

"Have you any scrap of a letter from her?"

"Not a line."

"But you have written to her?"

"Yes, once; a few lines, as I told you."

"She keeps these lines?" Mrs. Pollen said, with a half-melancholy smile.

"I don't know."

"Ask her," Mrs. Pollen said, "years from this, and she will produce the letter."

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The moment the Lisles heard of their daughter's whereabouts they sent a telegram to Bremen, and the result was that within forty-eight hours Mr. and Mrs. Walter Fitzurse arrived at the rectory. Walter had his wife and himself dressed in the most becoming way for a young pair who had made a secret marriage. It was a semi-penitential "throw-yourselves-on-the-mercy-of-parents" sort of get-up. Walter had still in his pocket a few, truly a very few, of the sovereigns which had once weighted Mrs. Pollen's casket. He had spent pretty freely for the few days of the adventure; and if the Lisles had proved obdurate, he positively would not have been able to pay for the passage to America unless by the pawning of watches and chains and some of Janette's trinkets.

The returning fugitives were well received at the rectory by every one but Georgie. He could not keep down his dislike of Fitzurse, whom he considered a beastly cad; and he could not get over his annoyance with Janette, because she had put the family so much out with her confounded nonsense. "I say, Janette, what a fool you have made of yourself," was his tender greeting to his newly married sister. Janette only smiled. She knew it was his way, and she did not believe he really meant it, and she thought that all brothers rather liked to snub their sisters and take the conceit out of them. Besides, she was far too happy to mind what even Georgie might have thought about her.

Mrs. Pollen called and brought Romont with her. The moment was trying for Romont. He knew that all eyes were on him. Mrs. Pollen was watching him with a curious interest, like that of a spectator who is anxious to know how some person suddenly made prominent will get through a difficult piece of ceremonial. Camiola, who had not the same knowledge of the actualities of the situation, fixed her eyes on Romont with a different interest. She could not but think that something had passed between Romont and Fitzurse which, if she only knew it, would explain Romont's sudden intervention; and she looked on with as much eagerness as if she might now get some glimpse of the truth from the expression of his face. Janette longed to see Romont welcome her husband with a truly cordial and friendly greeting, and she expected this and looked for it. Fitzurse came forward and held out his hand, and he looked into Romont's eyes. The expression was eloquent. It said as plainly as words could speak, "I am at your mercy; I know it. I deserve anything; but will you destroy me?"

Then Romont accepted the situation. "Over ankles over knees" is a sensible, practical sort of proverb—when one is in for a thing he may as well go right in for it. Romont did the necessary bit of play-acting and pretence with as good a grace and as much appearance of earnestness as all his practice in disguises and his skill in private theatricals enabled him to assume. He clasped Walter Fitzurse's hand.

"Fitzurse, my dear boy, how delighted I am to see you here"

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—emphasis on *here*—"and to give you my heartfelt congratulations."

Walter returned the clasp of the hand with a peculiar sort of little after-pressure, which plainly said, "You have spared me and saved me. I understand all your feelings; I give you my unending gratitude."

The minds of all the party were somehow relieved. There was hardly one present who had not had a more or less vague suspicion that Romont was Fitzurse's enemy, and could tell something dreadfully against him if he would. At the same time the common conviction was that Romont was a man who would not have pretended to any feeling which was not really in his heart. Therefore, when he thus cordially welcomed Fitzurse and warmly clasped his hand, it was like the verdict of acquittal by a jury of honour. Such is the value of a good character—such is even its oblique value, its refracted value. Romont's good character vindicated Walter, and Romont meanwhile was acting in direct contravention to his own principles, and making use of a good character to screen a bad one. It must be left to casuists and moralists to decide how far he was excusable in this, or whether he was wholly wrong. Ought he to have then and there exposed and proclaimed Walter's falsehood and treachery? Ought he to have told of the attempt at robbery and the attempt at murder? Ought he to have thereby rendered it impossible for Walter ever to retrieve himself, and so made Janette and Janette's father and mother unhappy for life? If he were not to do this, then was he not justified in completely concealing Walter's past misdeeds, and so giving him a real and not a sham chance of retrieving himself? A formal reception, a chilly reception, would assuredly have left Walter an object of suspicion and mistrust in the eyes of Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia and Camiola; would even have perhaps sown the first seed of doubt and distrust in the innocent heart of Janette herself. Could Romont make up his mind to do this? As well go in for a complete exposure at once. Walter Fitzurse starting to retrieve himself with the burden of common suspicion imposed upon him would have but a poor chance of making much way. Romont could not make himself the means of spoiling the unfortunate young man's last chance. He clasped Fitzurse's hand, and gave Fitzurse his good character to begin with all over again.

A sudden revulsion of good spirits came to Romont's help when this trying little scene was fairly got through. He set talk soon going and kept it alive. Janette withdrew into the background with Camiola; Georgie hung upon their skirts, pressing upon Janette a certain unwonted tenderness of brotherly interest, and all the time acting as a sort of screen between Camiola and any possible approach from the general company. Never does a young man look to less advantage in the eyes of the young woman he adores, and who does not adore him, than when he is trying to prevent some rival from coming to speech of her. Camiola understood

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perfectly well what Georgie was about; she could have explained to him the meaning of every movement he made, and every position he fell into, and every step he took; and she thought him provokingly undignified and ridiculous.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LOVE-GHOSTS HAUNT THE CHURCHYARD.

WHAT was it that prompted Vinnie, a few days after this, to turn into the old churchyard? She had not passed its gate since the night of her attempt to drown herself. She had always felt a shudder come over her when she thought of it. Yet this morning, when returning from her mother's rooms to Fitzurse House, she felt drawn and driven by a curious phantasy to go out of her way for the purpose of taking one look at the spot which was so long sacred to her love and her happiness. She reached the gate, opened it in a half-fearful way, as if something painful must happen to her should she go inside; and she went inside. She made her way to the wall that overlooked the river, and stood there a moment and recalled the memories of that dreadful night. The place was in solitude; the solitude and the sight of the water sent a chill through her; she turned away, and feeling weak and faint she sat down; just as she used to sit when she was waiting for Walter in the old days.

Now she was recovering from all that madness, she thought, and perhaps it might have been as well if she had not come into this churchyard so soon again. But she would have to see the old places, and she must be able to bear it; she would have to see him again, and to be able to bear it. Suddenly she heard the gate move, and she knew that some one had entered the churchyard. She did not look up; she kept her eyes fixed on the ground; she wanted to see nobody; if possible, not to be seen. The steps came nearer and nearer; it seemed as if they were now coming directly to her; and she heard her name spoken.

"Vinnie!"

The word made her tremble and start. She looked up, and with crimsoning cheeks saw that it was Walter Fitzurse who stood beside her. Oh, what memories of happy, hopeful, loving days and evenings, sunny afternoons, soft, dusk, quiet, contented hours in the glow of the fireside, with Mrs. Lammas at her work a little removed—what memories like these came rushing upon Vinnie as she saw him with his eyes fixed beseechingly on her! And then what recollections of bitter disappointment and desolation, of cruel loneliness and the agony of waiting in vain; of pain and madness and desperation, and of that terrible night's dream; that moment on the churchyard wall, that wild look up at the sky, that plunge into the swift-rushing river! Out of that river she seemed to have come up a new human being. Youth and hope and love and dis-

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appointment, all were buried for her in that plunge. Yet to see him now, and to be spoken to by him, seemed almost as if it could bring back the former Vinnie Lammas again, and torture her with the same misplaced love and the same cruel disappointment. He ought not to have come near her or spoken to her, she thought; and yet, of course, it must be sooner or later, and perhaps he was right to get it over at once. She was determined that she would not show any weakness; the past was the past for her.

"Mr. Fitzurse!" she said, making a desperate effort, and looking up to him with dazed eyes, which hardly saw anything, "I am so glad you are come home again. I didn't expect to see you here."

"No, Vinnie; and I didn't expect to see *you;* I turned in quite by chance just to have a look at the old place. But I am very glad to see you, Vinnie."

"Thank you," said Vinnie rather blankly. "I am glad that you are well; and—and—I think I had better be going."

"One moment, Vinnie. As we have met—we haven't met, you know, for a long time—I want to know—I should like—I hope you have learned to forgive me?"

He spoke in a low, pathetic, pleading tone, and looked very humble and beseeching.

"I don't know that I have anything to forgive, Mr. Fitzurse; I think it was all my own fault. I was very silly; I fancied you were very really in love with me, and that it would last like that for ever. I know now what nonsense that was, and how young gentlemen like to flirt as much as they can with any girl that comes in their way; and I thought it all meant something, and now, of course, I know that it meant nothing."

"Still I want to hear you say that you forgive me; I cannot feel at rest in my heart until I hear you say you forgive me."

"Oh yes, I forgive you, if I have anything to forgive; but I can't forgive myself quite as easily. I hope you will be happy; very happy, Mr. Fitzurse—all your life." The tears in her eyes were blurring for her all the scene and the outlines of his face.

"I don't deserve happiness; I did you great wrong; I don't know how it was——"

"It was all very natural and easy to understand," Vinnie said. "You had only known me, and you didn't know other girls, and you thought you—you cared about me; and then you saw a beautiful young lady—rich, and of rank, and educated, and clever, and all that—and, of course, you fell in love with her. You couldn't help that; and she is much better suited to you than I could ever have been—and don't mind about me. I am all right. People are very kind to me; and I hope you may be very happy—and she; and please I think I must go now."

"I should have been very happy, Vinnie, if I had never seen her; I should have been very happy with you——"

"Oh no; no, no!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Don't say that;

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it never could have been; we never were meant for one another; I think I felt that, or I feared it, even at the time. You ought to be in society and make a figure in the world; you were made for it and born for it; and I am only a poor little girl, and I should have been a mere drag on you and a dead weight on you—and oh! it's ever so much better as it is, and I shall soon come to be reconciled to it."

A thrill of keen and cowardly delight went through him. She was not yet reconciled to it—that was quite clear; she loved him still. He had come into the churchyard without the slightest expectation of seeing Vinnie, and, to say the truth, without one single thought concerning her. He had for the time shaken off all memory of her, and his chief idea in entering the churchyard was that it would be pleasant now, in the pride of his success, to have a look at the old place where he used to hang about in his unsuccessful days. The sudden sight of Vinnie surprised him and roused his curiosity. Why had she come there? Was it because she was still thinking of him? This was interesting. He spoke to her; and from the moment of her reply he went on without any definite purpose, but such as each new word or tone or gesture of hers might suggest. In a few seconds he found himself playing the tender apologetic part of one who too late discovers that he has thrown a pearl away richer than all his tribe. Walter lived mainly for success in life; but, unfortunately for him, his power to play a part had a strangely incongruous and fantastic vein in it; and he was always turning aside to indulge in a mood of semi-sensuous and dreamy sentimentalism. That was the one defect which for his other objects filled him with faults. For the moment it was nothing to him that he was the recognized and received husband of an earl's granddaughter. Fate had thrown Vinnie Lammas in his way; Vinnie Lammas whom he had tossed aside so heedlessly, and about whom half an hour ago he cared no more than he cared for "Sally in Our Alley;" and behold he must sit down by her and indulge himself in playing for a few minutes the part of the repentant lover who comes, too late, to see the full value of the love-treasure he had lost. He sat down by Vinnie and endeavoured to take her hand. He had no evil purpose; no deliberate purpose of any kind. Chance threw in his way the opportunity of a fresh and interesting sentimental sensation, and he could not for the life of him resist the temptation. Vinnie drew her hand away and got up.

"You are right," he said, rising also and standing not quite so close to her as he had been; "you are right, dear Vinnie, and I was wrong." She did not ask him what he meant, although she had not been offering any opinions as to the right or wrong of anything.

"I was wrong in attempting to touch your hand," he said, "or to sit near you, or to detain you here. We are nothing to each other any more, and should keep apart. We shall have to see each

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other, I suppose, but we must not meet any more; for I don't call seeing each other in a crowd or in a room with other people—I don't call that meeting. You will love some one yet who will be better worth your love than I was; and you will be happy. I almost wish I had not come in here to-day; but how did I know? There is a fate in these things, I suppose. Good-bye."

"Oh, Walter—Mr. Fitzurse," she exclaimed, "how I wish you had not come here to-day! Why did I come here? What brought me? I was getting reconciled and quiet, and I thought I was able to bear anything; and I was getting over the memory of that dreadful night. Oh, why must I think of it?"

"What night, Vinnie? What dreadful night?" He asked this question in all sincerity.

"That night—oh, don't you know? Oh, you *do* know—the night—the Sunday night—when I came here and tried to drown myself—flung myself into the river——"

"Vinnie! Vinnie! I never heard—I never knew anything about this. What night was it? Why did you do it?"

"I did it because I was mad, because I was in love with you, and you didn't care about me any more! It was only a little while ago, the Sunday night when you went away—went away—I mean when you went to be married to Miss Lisle. Oh, I was so miserable and so wild I hardly knew what I was doing, and I wanted to be rid of my life, and I came here and flung myself into the water—and I must have been drowned only for Mr. Romont——"

"Only for Mr. Romont! Did he save you? He?"

"He saved me; he is so strong and brave! Sometimes I wish he hadn't saved me, but he did; and he and Mr. Pilgrim brought me to the rectory, and there every one was kind to me. And Mrs. Pollen is so good—and I was getting better—and I wish, Walter Fitzurse, that you hadn't come here to-day, or that I hadn't come. And why, why, why didn't you let me alone?" The poor girl fairly broke down in tears and hysterics. She was terrified at the thought of falling back again into her old love. She felt like some weakling lover of drink who has been doing his best to keep temperate and finds temptation suddenly thrust up to his very lips, who longs to be reformed and feels all his worser nature craving for drink, and who can only moan and shudder at the thought that if this last long enough the spirit of evil must carry the day.

She sat down again, and Walter sat beside her more boldly now. A sensation of wild triumph was filling him. Vinnie had tried to drown herself for love of him! That was magnificent romance! But one cannot have everything, and there was a bitter drop in the thought that Romont had saved her; that Romont knew all about him and his love-affair with Vinnie; that Vinnie had probably told it all to Romont; that Romont would remember how the very first night Walter and he met, Romont had talked a good deal about Vinnie and her supposed lover in Fitzurseham,

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and had not suspected that the lover was sitting there before him. Walter began to be almost borne down by the thought of the number of things which Romont knew about him, and the dread of his some day letting them all out.

"I hope, Vinnie," he said gravely, "you did not think of confiding to Mr. Romont, or to any one else, that chapter in our history which ended so strangely and so sadly for both of us? It would not be like you to do that."

"I never told any one," Vinnie said, flushing a little. "I was never asked any question by any one. They are all too kind and good to think of cross-questioning me; and I didn't know until after that it was Mr. Romont who saved me. I didn't know it until next day; and I never spoke one word to him about it. I never even thanked him; I thought he would rather I didn't—at least that he would think perhaps it pained me to say anything about it, and so would rather I didn't, for he wouldn't misunderstand me, I know."

Walter Fitzurse was conscious of a positive pang of jealousy shooting through him keen as a physical pain. He was made jealous by Vinnie's evident admiration for Romont. "She is in love with him. They all like him—every one," was the thought. "Well, Vinnie," he said, "we must part. I mustn't keep you here. I am glad we have met again; and sorry too, I think. But we should have to meet some time, and it is as well we should have our first meeting here, in this old place—this dear old place. You do not love me any more, Vinnie. Why should you? How could you?"

"You shouldn't even say such words," Vinnie said with some spirit. "You are married; you have a clever and a beautiful wife. You couldn't think so badly of me as to suppose that I could care about you any more—except as a friend, of course," she added.

"You will love some one else soon," he said, watching her keenly. "Why should you not? Perhaps already——"

But the girl stopped him in his speech.

"Oh, for shame!" she sobbed, breaking down again in tears. "Why do you talk so? Why can't you let me alone? Fancy your telling me that I am in love with some one else already!"

Fitzurse triumphed in his heart. "She loves me still," he said to himself, "that is quite clear. Good-bye, Vinnie." He held out his hand, but Vinnie ran past him and out of the gate, and was gone.

Fitzurse walked complacently to the rectory to go out for a drive with Janette, who was pining for him, and was beguiling the drear time of his short absence by discoursing to Camiola about his gifts and his virtues. Fitzurse was made more tender than ever with Janette by the thought that Vinnie Lammas was still in love with him. The knowledge gratified his self-love, and made him all the more willing to be loving to his wife. He had, be it said, no

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evil purpose in his mind as regarded Vinnie. It would have been of no avail so far as she was concerned; but in fact he had no such thought. He was delighted to think that Vinnie was still in love with him, and he was pleased that he had met her and had drawn what was really an acknowledgment of this from her; and that was enough for him. He would tell Janette the whole story some time, he thought—a story a little edited in his own interest it would come out, we may be sure. It would be a story of hopeless passion on the one side, and heroic magnanimity on the other.

"Where have you been, child?" Mrs. Pollen said, as she stood on the lawn and Vinnie came up to her.

"I've been to see mamma, and I gave her your message."

"Yes, that's right; but what happened to you on the way back? Did you meet any one?"

"Oh, Mrs. Pollen, why do you ask?" She was frightened.

"Well, because I know the sight of your mother, whom you see every night, didn't throw you into a state of confusion that lasted from her house quite on to mine. You have been crying; let me look at your eyes. Come, now; I'll tell you one thing you have been doing. You have been in the old churchyard."

"Oh, how do you know?"

"You have been there, and you have been crying there—I can see that; and I know why." Mrs. Pollen suspected at first nothing more than that Vinnie had gone into the churchyard to indulge in morbid fancies and unwholesome memories there. "You must not go there for a long time, child; until you have got over all this. It is not good for you to keep the past in your recollection. I guessed that you had been to that place the moment I saw your face." Then she saw another expression pass quick as a flash of light across Vinnie's face—the expression of one who has something more to tell but fears or does not know how to tell it. "Oh, there is something more, then? I have not heard all? You met some one in the churchyard—yes, of course, I see it all now. You met Walter Fitzurse there. That is what happened."

"But I never thought of seeing him there; I never thought of such a thing. I wouldn't have gone in there for all the world if I had any idea of his ever being there, now."

"No, Vinnie; I am quite sure of that. I couldn't for a moment suspect you of any wish to see him again."

"Oh no; no, no," poor Vinnie murmured.

"But he talked to you; and he was pathetic, wasn't he? He spoke of the old days, and excused himself and all that; and rather implied that it was a pity things hadn't ended otherwise, and destiny and all that sort of thing?"

"Why, surely, Mrs. Pollen," Vinnie asked with widespread and affrighted eyes, "you never could have been there? You didn't hear?"

Mrs. Pollen smiled complacently. She was right, then, in her guesses. The rest would be easy.

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"I wasn't there, child, and I knew nothing whatever about what he said or you said; but I have some experience of the world, and of men, and of girls; and I know what that sort of man would say under the circumstances; and I think I know what he wanted to get you to say. Shall I tell you?"

"No; please don't," Vinnie said, much distressed.

"Yes, I must; to show you what sort of person he is, and how much a matter of common form all this sort of thing is. Well, let me see; he hoped you would be happy with some one else—didn't he?—and said you would soon find some one worthier of your love than he had been?"

"Oh, how do you know?"

"Regular sort of thing, my dear child; might as well be got off by heart out of a polite letter-writer or sent about in circulars. Then he asked you if you hadn't already found some one to love; and then you burst into tears and made it only too plain to him that you hadn't. Isn't that the whole story, Vinnie?"

Poor Vinnie had to confess with renewed shame and tears that that was the whole story; that Mrs. Pollen knew it all as well as if she had been a listener. Mrs. Pollen had given her a sharp and wholesome lesson. All that Walter had said must be in the common trick of such men—else how could Mrs. Pollen have known it?—and he was merely playing it off on her to amuse his own vanity.

"He is not worth thinking about," Mrs. Pollen said.

"Don't you think he ever cared for me, any time?" Vinnie asked timidly.

"Never cared, and never will care, for you, or any one in the world but himself," was Mrs. Pollen's answer. She was determined to call Vinnie's still undestroyed sense of self-respect to her rescue, even though she had to sting it into action.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. AND MRS. WALTER FITZURSE.

THE whole tone of the rectory had curiously changed since the marriage of Walter and Janette, and the return of the runaways. It was like the introduction of some strange and chilling substance into a composition of sweetness and tempered warmth; all was turned into congested ice-blocks. Mr. Lisle was not a man to do things by halves; and when once he had made up his mind to welcome his new son-in-law, he gave the welcome with all the cordiality he could command, and with an unrestricted resolve to do as much for that son-in-law as if he were a son. But Mr. Lisle was not a man of very flexible manners, and he found it hard to put on an air of cordial affection where he felt no affection; to "cry content to that which grieved his heart." He could not like Walter Fitzurse; the more he tried to like him, the less he succeeded. He could not, somehow, trust the young man. Mr. Lisle

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was utterly unable to explain to himself the reason for such a mood of mind; but he always felt as if any hour might bring him some painful discovery about his new son-in-law. He felt as some head of a family might feel to whose house an impostor has come, passing off for a long-lost son and heir, and who, while compelled by what seems resistless force of evidence to accept and welcome the claimant, cannot force his heart to warm to the stranger, and finds that something in his blood chills mysteriously every time they come together.

Even Mr. Lisle's affection for his daughter, and his sincere desire to make her happy, could not quite enable him to mask his feelings when he spoke to her about her young husband. Mr. Lisle could not altogether conceal from Janette the fact that he commiserated her for having such a husband. His very graciousness, his redoubled tenderness to her, told the same story.

Now Janette did not consider herself by any means an object of compassion because she was married to Walter Fitzurse. On the contrary, she regarded herself as a proud and happy girl who has won a splendid prize. She wanted every one, and more especially her father and mother, to regard her in that light; and her eyes, made doubly quick by love of her husband and jealousy on his behalf, soon saw that her father and mother did not so regard her. Therefore she kept Walter to herself as much as possible; she withdrew him quietly so far as she could from those who were unable to appreciate him. The rectory was broken up into little chilly groups; and the ostentation of general forgiveness and reconciliation, which was common to all, only made the isolation and the chilliness more complete. Walter began to be very glad when people came to the rectory. He dreaded a dinner alone with the family. He had not much opportunity of displaying his triumph when only Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia and Camiola and Georgie were there to bear witness to it.

For some days nothing was said about plans and prospects. One day, however, the Rector had a long talk with Walter concerning the future. He thought, and Lady Letitia thought, it would be well for Walter to go to the bar. If he wished, and Janette liked it, he was to be enabled to do this, and to be helped forward in every way. Janette would have liked Walter to go into Parliament at once as the representative of some cause concerned with universal charity and the general brotherhood of man. As, however, it was not easy all in a moment to find a constituency for which this programme would absolutely suffice, it was agreed that the parliamentary project should stand over for the present, and that Walter should go on with his studies for the bar, and should make some attempt at literary achievement. To Janette it seemed merely a choice of the field in which Walter was to succeed; he was to be this or he was to be that, just as he pleased; success was equally certain for him. Walter himself was even still a good deal of the same way of thinking. It was finally arranged—and this

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was a great relief to all parties when it came to be talked about and settled on—that Walter and Janette were to live for the most part in the Rector's town house, and were only to visit Fitzurseham whenever they felt so inclined. Janette was delighted; she would have Walter all to herself, and Camiola would come to them ever so often. Walter was glad, for he felt sat upon at the rectory, and he did not like meeting old Fitzurseham acquaintances in the streets. Fitzurseham was an irreverent, jeering sort of place; it would jeer at success as well as failure. Walter hated old Jethro Merridew's profound and courtly bow, in which he could not help thinking there was more of sarcasm than of reverence; he dreaded meeting Pilgrim; and, after his late adventure, he thought the less he saw of Vinnie Lammas the better.

Those who set themselves to the task of reforming and reclaiming their erring brothers and sisters, sometimes, it is said, come across a class of penitent with whom it is difficult and even provoking to deal. The penitent of this order, however sincerely sorry for past trespasses, and resolved not to repeat them, is yet disposed to dwell with a certain morbid complacency on the memory of the sins committed, and to regard himself as a species of interesting invalid, the whole story of whose past spiritual ailments cannot be repeated too often or told at too great length. "I am a penitent," so we may suppose one of this class to put the case, "and therefore you, my healthy brother or sister, are bound to take a great interest in me and all that concerns me; and I am especially anxious that you should hear over again a full and detailed exposition of my past sins." This love for dwelling on the incidents of vice seems sometimes hardly in keeping with penitence. Impatient observers are apt to ask which is really the greater vice, the inconsiderate and hardly conscious sin, or the complacent fondling and cherishing of sin's worst memories. The penitence of Walter Fitzurse was somewhat of this latter class. It did not appear to occur to him that he ought to be anything but an object of interest and care to Mrs. Pollen and to Albert Romont. He had delivered himself into Romont's hands, and he seemed to consider that Romont was bound to look after him.

Walter had full reliance on Romont. It is a common mistake to suppose that men who are deceivers themselves will never believe that any other man is free from deceit. This is a mistake for which Shakespeare certainly gives no warrant; Iago is perfectly convinced of the truth and sincerity of Othello. But there was something which made Fitzurse uneasy, which disturbed his sleep of nights, which made him send inquiring and suspicious glances around by day and night. Where was Mrs. Pollen's Albanian servant, Joseph? It was idle to repose in self-satisfied confidence on Romont's silence and protection so long as there was another man who knew pretty well as much as Romont did, and who could by no means be trusted so profoundly. Joseph must have known that Fitzurse had attempted to get at Mrs. Pollen's money; Joseph must have

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heard the sound of a pistol-shot; the very pledge which Romont gave for Joseph—that what he, Romont, did not tell, Joseph would not tell—only proved that Joseph was in the secret. But how, Walter put it to himself, could Romont be able always to rely on Joseph's secrecy? Suppose for any reason the Albanian came to be dismissed from Mrs. Pollen's service? Was it not quite on the cards that he would then endeavour to put the screw on Fitzurse? And was he dismissed? If not, where was he? Suppose Joseph were to tell Pilgrim? Suppose Pilgrim were to tell Vinnie Lammas? Suppose Joseph had already told Mrs. Pollen? Walter felt that, on the whole, the absence of Joseph was more terrible than his presence.

"Come to dinner with me to-morrow, you two," Mrs. Pollen said one day to Walter and Janette. "Only yourselves; or any one else you like. I shall like any one you like."

"Please, only ourselves," Janette pleaded; "and Camiola, if she can come." This she said doubtfully, thinking of Georgie.

"No, not Camiola," Mrs. Pollen said; "I suppose you wouldn't be allowed to leave your brother alone here; and do you know, dear, I think two pairs of spoons would be rather too much for me at one time. I suppose Camiola wouldn't like to come without him?"

"Oh, I don't know," Janette began in a rather dismal tone, for she saw no evidence of any absorbing passion for Georgie on Camiola's part. Then she stopped. "We'll come alone," she said.

"By the way," Walter asked, "how is your Albanian servant—Joseph, was he called?"

Nothing could be more innocent and natural than such a question; but Mrs. Pollen at once thought there was something in the tone of Walter's voice, and a faint tremulous movement of his lip, which told of anxiety, and set her straightway on the watch. She thought she would play him a little.

"Joseph, my Albanian? Oh yes, to be sure; are you interested in him? I didn't think you ever saw him?"

"Yes, I have seen him. I am not particularly interested in him; but he was picturesque, I think. Is he not a very good servant, didn't you tell me once?"

"No, I don't think I told you anything about him; but I am glad to hear what you think of him. Yes; he is very good, in a way. He has his own fits, however; he would not get on with everybody. He used to suit me very well; but I have so many odd fits myself."

"He used to suit you?" Walter asked nervously. "Is he gone?"

"Gone, where?" Mrs. Pollen asked, with innocent expression.

"I mean, has he left your service?"

"Do you know, now, that I should be glad to get your opinion—whether you think such a man as Joseph is really the best sort of servant for a woman like me? Does it look absurd to have an Albanian servant in London?"

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"I don't see how that matters. Are you thinking of getting rid of him?"

"Joseph," said Mrs. Pollen gravely, and keeping her eyes fixed on Walter, "is not so easily got rid of as all that." Then she suddenly changed the conversation, and Fitzurse saw that it would not do to try to bring her back to the Albanian just then.

The next day they dined with Mrs. Pollen in Dover Street. Walter looked out for Joseph, but did not see him. He grew more and more uneasy. Suppose Mrs. Pollen had quarrelled with Joseph and dismissed him from her service, would he not be more dangerous than before? After dinner, when they were in the drawing-room, Mrs. Pollen suddenly seemed to bethink herself of something.

"Will you excuse me? I *am* so stupid; I was near forgetting something." She rang the bell and her maid came.

"I want this letter sent over to Fitzurse House at once, and please let Mr. Pilgrim be told that I shall want Joseph to-morrow."

She watched Fitzurse's face keenly with a side glance, and as she read his expression it was one of relief at finding that Joseph was still to the front. Whereupon she changed her tactics, and asked somewhat sharply of the maid—

"Has Joseph been here to-day?"

"No, ma'am."

The maid looked surprised at the question.

"Nor yesterday?"

"No, ma'am. I haven't seen Joseph this ever so long."

Mrs. Pollen turned away.

"Well, you can send that letter, with the message. Joseph is an eccentric sort of person," she went on, now addressing herself to Walter and Janette. "There seems a sort of fatality in it that I, being myself eccentric, should get surrounded by more or less eccentric retainers. Joseph is an odd sort of creature."

Walter looked decidedly embarrassed. As Mrs. Pollen read his thoughts, it appeared clear to her that for some reason Walter was afraid of Joseph, but would much rather have him at hand than absent; that his disappearance would have been a source of alarm. It was her instant resolve to play a little upon this string until it should discourse a good deal more of Walter's secret feelings to her. She had made up her mind that he required looking after. The incident with Vinnie in the churchyard had filled her with anger and contempt for him. "There is only one way," she thought, "to keep him straight, and that is by the influence of fear. He shan't make Janette unhappy, or play with little Vinnie's feelings either, if I can help it." So Walter had a real living watcher and a phantom watcher, and he was afraid of the unseen eye of the phantom, and read no menace in the living eyes of Mrs. Pollen. Mortals are often a good deal like that. They are suspicious of phantoms and off their guard to realities.

It was a very pleasant evening for two of the company at least, and it was interesting for the third. Mrs. Pollen was anxious to

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make Janette as happy as she could, and she knew well that the best way to make Janette happy would be by making much of Janette's husband. So she set herself with all her skill to draw Walter out. She set him on to talk about himself and about his plans for the future; she encouraged him in his hopes, and gave it to be understood in the most delicate way that he should never want a friendly helping hand while she was to the front. Under this genial influence, Walter soon began talking with as much openness and freedom as if he were talking to Janette or to himself. Mrs. Pollen came to learn from what he said that the ambition which under some conditions might only be his bane, might possibly now be his best chance of salvation. She was in a way perfectly sincere. She had grown to dislike him strongly, and she had not much hope in his coming to anything; but she had set her heart on making him, if it could be, a good husband to Janette.

That was the first night Janette and he were to pass in Mr. Lisle's town house. Walter felt happy at the thought of having now turned his back on Fitzurseham for ever. As they were going, and while Janette was having her things put on, Mrs. Pollen found a chance of exchanging a word with Fitzurse.

"I have no words to thank you," he said fervently; "no man ever before could have had such a friend in his need."

"Remember," Mrs. Pollen answered, "that you will always have friends for *her* sake. Love her and devote yourself to her, and try to be worthy of her; and you will have friends who will never neglect you. I think the better of you because you have ambition. It is generally the enemy of love, they say; but it will not be so in your case, mind—not in your case. Cling to *her*, and you will find that for you ambition and love go hand in hand Dearest Janette, good-night."

CHAPTER XXX.

BREAKING.

"Oh, this weary, dreadful war," Lady Letitia said to Camiola as they were alone after breakfast the day following. The rectory was very lonely after Janette and Walter had removed to town, and yet there was to Lady Letitia a sense of relief in their absence. Janette cared for nobody now but her husband; and Lady Letitia could not like him, and could hardly even pretend to like him. "That's how our children go," she said. She felt all the more drawn towards Camiola, and was inclined to cling to her with an exorbitant affection.

Camiola knew what was coming when she heard the first words about the war.

"Georgie will have to go back soon, very soon, I am afraid, Camiola; and he has set his heart on marrying you before he goes, my dear. I think you will have to gratify the poor boy, Camiola.

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It might as well be first as last, you know; and it will be such a happiness to me to have my Georgie's wife here to pet and to console, and be consoled by, while our young soldier is away at the war." She put her arm fondly round Camiola's waist and kissed her cheek. Camiola's cheek grew red as that of the unfortunate lady in the "Arabian Nights," when the importunate and malignant salesman insists on kissing her; and she felt her heart sink. What could she do but burst into tears? What else could any girl do? Then she told the startled Lady Letitia, amid sobs, exactly what she had told to Georgie. Lady Letitia drew off in cold dismay and misery.

"Well, this *is* hard on the poor boy," Lady Letitia said at last. "It looks very much as if you were playing fast and loose with him, Camiola. I do think you might have made up your mind."

"I have made up my mind," Camiola said, with strong emotion in her voice now. "I told Georgie I would marry him if he liked, and I will marry him if he likes. I never said that I was in love with him. I told him from the very first that I was not in love with him, and that I never could be. I did more than that, Lady Letitia—I told him that I was in love with some one else——"

"But I can't help calling that unwomanly; yes, very unwomanly," Lady Letitia interrupted. It was a sort of relief to her to get a chance of being what she considered reasonably angry about something. "I am surprised, I am, indeed; it isn't a bit like you, Camiola!"

"Womanly, or unwomanly it is true all the same," poor Camiola said. "I don't see how it was unwomanly to tell him the truth. I think it wouldn't have been very womanly to deceive him—to let him marry me under the belief that I cared for him, and cared for nobody but him; I don't think that would have been altogether womanly. Or perhaps it would, as satirists describe woman; perhaps deceit would have been the proper womanly thing—more in our line." Camiola was growing sarcastic now.

"Oh, it's all so unhappy; it's all so wretched; I don't know what is coming over this unfortunate house! Everything used to go so well, and now everything goes wrong."

"I suppose it's my fault. But I don't know how or why. I am sure I would do anything in the world to help to make you all happy. Dear, dear Lady Letitia, don't scold me, but just tell me what I am to do."

Lady Letitia sighed; she was in mere despair.

"I am afraid I don't quite know, Camiola. I am afraid I am dreadfully unjust to you, my dear, and that I am blaming you for what isn't your fault. It isn't any wonder that these young men should fall in love with you—and you know I always set my face against Georgie's falling in love with you. I was always afraid of it, and I was glad he went away to Egypt for that reason, although, of course, it was a terrible trial; and now it has all come to pass just as I feared, only a great deal worse. It is unmanly of Georgie,

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I know. But you must make allowance for a mother. We don't like our boys to suffer any pain; and Georgie is suffering pain enough just now, goodness knows."

"I am sure I am not particularly happy," Camiola said. "I have my feelings too. No one seems to me to make much account of them. I am in love, if you must have it; and still I am willing, if Georgie likes it, to marry him. I declare I don't quite know whether I am doing right or doing wrong in this. I sometimes think it is a dreadful sin; but after all I think I am bound to make a sacrifice for the sake of all of you, and so I will marry Georgie, and what can I do or say more?"

"Camiola, there is something in all this that I don't quite understand. I am not a thought-reader like your friend Mrs. Pollen; I have never studied the art of divining people's minds; I have never been in the East." Lady Letitia was not well pleased with Mrs. Pollen lately, and had grown jealous of her influence over Camiola. "But though I am not so clever and accomplished as all that, I can see that you are not letting me know the whole story of this business. You are in love with some one, it seems. I don't name his name, but I suppose I could guess."

"Please don't guess, if you can help it," Camiola said; "one doesn't quite like all one's folly being known."

"Well, never mind about the name. Why don't you marry him, Camiola?"

"I must not tell you, dear Lady Letitia."

"Has he asked you?"

"He has."

"And you refused him?"

"I told him I was engaged to Georgie."

"Was he satisfied with that?"

"Oh no," Camiola answered, reddening.

"Would you marry him if you were free?"

"I don't think so—now."

"And you can't tell me the reason?"

"No, dear, I can't." Camiola was beginning to feel more and more strongly every day that her reason for not marrying Romont was not a very sufficient one. She had been hurt and offended by his way of finding out the secret of her love, and her womanly resentment carried her so far at first that she told herself and told him that nothing on earth should ever induce her to marry him, and that she would try her very best to conquer her love and to forget him. But this resolve did not seem exactly as if it were likely to increase in strength as time went on, and as the contrast between Georgie's character and Romont's began to show itself more distinctly. Nothing could have been more forbearing, more chivalrous, she thought, than Romont's conduct towards her since the one night when he tried to take her heart by storm. He had never spoken a word of love to her since; he had never tried to be alone with her; he had never tried to exchange a glance of mean-

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ing with her. He had left his fate and hers absolutely in her hands.

"Well, Camiola, I must not press you. It is your own secret—I suppose girls couldn't live if they weren't having secrets!"

"I suppose not," said Camiola, quietly. "Life does not seem to allow them much chance of living without secrets."

"Anyhow, I must not ask you to tell me. I will speak to Georgie, Camiola; I will reason with him all I can, and I will get his father to reason with him; only I would rather have it all to myself if I could, because I think I could make greater allowance for his weaknesses than a man could, even though his father. Mr. Lisle thinks a man ought to do what is right without hesitation—and of course, so he ought; we all know that. But every man isn't like Mr. Lisle——"

"No, indeed," Camiola heartily assented.

"I am afraid his son is not one of the few who are like him. I will try to make Georgie listen to reason, and he *shall* listen to it. You shall not be persecuted any more, Camiola; you shall be free from this engagement, take my word for that. It would be a sin and a shame, a disgraceful and a cowardly thing for Georgie to insist on marrying any girl under such conditions—a girl who hates and despises him——"

"Oh, Lady Letitia, how can you say such things? how can you be so unjust? Fancy my hating and despising Georgie!"

"You may not say so much even to yourself, Camiola, but I know what you feel by what you have told me. You do hate and despise my unfortunate boy, and it would be the most unmanly thing of him to marry any girl who felt like that. How he ever was able to bring himself to keep pressing you to marry him after you had told him you were in love—positively in love—with this other young man, I can't understand. But even Georgie must draw the line somewhere, and he shall draw it here. Don't think about it any more, Camiola; you shall be free again to marry any man whom you do like and for whom you feel respect. I don't mind acknowledging to you that my poor boy has not exactly acted in a way to win any girl's respect."

There was a tone of bitterness in Lady Letitia's words. Camiola could not fail to understand what it meant. Lady Letitia tried to be just towards her, but could not. It was only too plain that in her heart she resented Camiola's want of love for Georgie, and blamed Camiola for all that had happened. Even when she saw Georgie's weakness, and was ashamed of it, she felt angry with Camiola for being the cause of his exposure and humiliation. For the time at least Lady Letitia's affection for Camiola was chilled, and Camiola felt all the influence of the chill.

Camiola's eyes were moistened with tears as she looked from her window over the garden and the river. She knew that, come what would, she must leave that place for ever. It had been a happy home, the happiest of homes, to her; and now she must leave it,

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and part from her dearest, best friends in coldness and almost in anger. "What have I done to deserve this?" she asked herself again and again. The only fault she seemed to have committed was in ever, under any conditions, consenting to listen to poor Georgie's love-story. She now saw that she ought to have refused firmly to make him any promise, that she ought to have followed the impulse of her heart, and declared that she would never consent to marry any man whom she did not love with all the strength of her whole nature. Yet even when she yielded to Georgie's importunity, she believed that she was faithfully following the dictates of her conscience and her heart, as Mr. Lisle had told her to do. She thought her first duty in life was to the Lisle family; and at that time she did not know that there was any reason why she should allow her heart to give a lodging in it to Romont. If she had known then how Romont felt to her, things would have been different; but she did not. Now, how sadly all had turned out! Instead of making the Lisles happy, she was making them miserable; and if Georgie were to go back to the war and be killed there, she would be blamed as the cause of his death. There were moments as she looked on the river when she thought she could quite understand why Vinnie Lammas felt the impulse to try to escape from the trouble of the hour by a plunge into its depths.

All this time Romont was very happy. He felt his happiness; he enjoyed it, and made the most of it. He had not the least doubt that things would go right in the end; he had not the least doubt that Camiola would marry him, however the result might be brought about. She loved him. He had kissed her and declared her pledged to him, and he held her pledged to him, and he felt safe in his conviction that she would never marry Georgie Lisle. Romont made himself very busy all this time; and, as has been said before, if the reader finds in these pages no record of his various enterprises and occupations, it is only because we have set ourselves to tell a love-story, and not to give a detailed account of the progress of sundry philanthropic undertakings. Romont felt that if he did not keep himself hard at work in this sort of way, he never could restrain himself from haunting Camiola; and that he did not mean to do. He wished to make it clear to her that he was not going to obtrude himself on her, that he had full faith in her, that he was sure she would take the right course, that he understood her. If he had been inspired by some supernatural adviser he could not just then have adopted any course better calculated to draw to him Camiola's fondest and most grateful thoughts. She understood him as he understood her; she loved him all the more because he did not seek her out or put himself in her way; and the more she came to understand that in this generous abstinence there was also the firm faith of a lover, who regarded her as pledged in fact to him, the more she felt that the pledge was at least a soul's reality.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A REFUGEE.

THAT same night while Camiola was still looking across the scene and the skies, she heard a patter of feet outside her door, and presently a hurried tapping, and "Please may I come in, Camiola?" She opened her door to admit little Alice. The child was in her night-gown, and looked very pale.

"I stole down to speak to you, Camiola," she said, when Camiola had closed the door again. "I know something is going to happen soon; you are going to marry Georgie and to go away, or else you won't marry him; and you will go away from us——"

"My dear little Alice, what has put all these things into your head? You are a foolish little girl."

"I know it all the same," Alice said, with an air of great wisdom, "and I want to tell you that I love you better than Georgie does, and that I think it is very wicked of Georgie to want to marry you and take you away. But I shall love you always; and I am sure you would love me better only for Georgie—and—and—listen, Camiola; do you think papa and mamma will love me after you have gone?"

"They couldn't love you more than they do now, you silly child."

"Oh yes, they could; they are always loving some one else—Georgie, or Janette, or you, or somebody; and what I wanted to ask you is, do you think they will love me better after you have gone? I don't want you to go, Camiola; but do you think they will care more for me when there's no one here to care for but me?"

The little thing was perfectly serious, and Camiola felt the deepest compassion for her. The morbid sensitiveness which was strong in Georgie and in Janette, had reached its acutest stage in her. Mere egotism in Georgie had fomented it into selfishness; generosity and affection in Janette had softened and purified it into tenderness and devotion; who should say what it might come to be with Alice as the years grew on her? Not merely did she yearn to be loved, to be loved by every one, but she yearned to be loved by every one more than any one else was loved. Her child-soul was hungry for a monopoly in love. Camiola now was beginning to understand her fully; Mrs. Pollen had divined her from the first. Who should say what sort of life she was preparing for herself? Could any love and any constancy satisfy that inordinate longing to be loved and loved the most? Would the love of even the most devoted husband be enough? Are there many husbands who could always give back, without stint and measure, equal love for that love? Camiola soothed and pacified the child as well as she might, and got her quietly to bed again; but Camiola found herself made sleepless by the thought of Alice and of her thirst for the uttermost

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of every one's love. How little was known of all this to Lady Letitia! Camiola was cut to the heart by the child's simple selfishness, outspoken almost directly in the wish that Camiola might be gone, might be out of the way, because her sick fancy made her believe that while Camiola was there she would be cut off from her due share of her parents' love. "Yes, I must go; it is time," Camiola said.

Mrs. Pollen was seated one evening at her organ. She was playing for her own enjoyment. She was alone. The music gradually swept her senses away into distant years and places. Her early days, her later life, floated before her in a sort of spirit-like review. She saw herself a dreamy impassioned child in an Indian kingdom; no province then, governed by an English civil functionary, but the realm of an independent sovereign; she saw her married days; the life of worthless wealth, of hateful ostentation, of vulgar companionship; she saw her own growing impatience and wilfulness; her fits of wild eccentric humour; she saw the white, sunny streets of Athens, and she thought of friends she had known and loved there, and of the influence they had had upon her. And then her mind was stricken anew with the blow of her husband's sudden death, she not by his side; and the bitter repentance came, and the long, sad season when the remorseful heart sought repentance and peace in stern Jerusalem. And then came in its turn the quickening resolve to go back to England, to be a living woman among living men and women, and try to do good for some one.

She rose suddenly from the organ.

"Am I doing good to any one—for any one?" she asked impatiently and aloud. "Am I not doing harm? Who is any the better for me?"

She would very likely have sat down and sobbed, but that she heard the outer door of the music-room open, and in a moment Camiola came in. From the look on the girl's face, Mrs. Pollen knew that something had happened.

"I present myself as a sort of feminine Coriolanus, Mrs. Pollen! You must be a feminine Tullus Aufidius; only that we don't happen to be enemies, and never were!" Camiola was trying to be sprightly, but her smile was wan and painful; about as like the smile of gladness as the sun's rays in an east wind are like the sun's rays when the wind is from the west.

"You have left the rectory," Mrs. Pollen exclaimed. coming at once to the point of Camiola's poor little effort at playfulness, her allusion to Coriolanus and Tullus Aufidius.

"Yes, I have come to you; this extremity hath brought me to thy hearth, dear Tullus Aufidius, or Tulla Aufidia, if that would be better. At least, I want to stay here—or in town with you, I mean —just for a little, if you don't mind—if you will have me?"

"I was so lonely," Mrs. Pollen said, "I was in such miserable spirits, that I verily believe I was just going to sit down and cry. You have come like an angel to my relief—only I must feel

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some compassion for those you have left. My sweet Camiola, sit here by me and tell me all about it."

Camiola made it as short a story as possible, and she bore up bravely, and would not give way to her feelings until the story was all told. Well, Lady Letitia knew everything; and Lady Letitia had insisted on Georgie giving up the engagement and setting Camiola free, and Georgie was very wild; and he was going back to Egypt at once. And though Lady Letitia said she did not blame Camiola, yet Camiola knew what she must feel. "It was useless, Mrs. Pollen; I couldn't stay there any more. Oh, how fond I was of them all! And how fond they were of me—until this dreadful thing happened. I loved Lady Letitia and Janette; I would have given my life for them, oh, I would, I *would*—and this is what it all comes to! And Lady Letitia blames me in her heart, I know, and she will not love me any more." With these words, her story being told, Camiola fairly broke down, and for a time the rest was silence.

Mrs. Pollen indulged her to the full. She let the grief of the girl's affectionate heart have its way. "You are welcome to me, my dear," she said at last, in her low, deep tone, "to my hearth, and to my heart; for I love you, Camiola. Stop!" Mrs. Pollen said suddenly, rising. "Mr. Romont!" She had seen Romont pass the window; his key was already in the door.

She expected that Camiola would hurry out of the room; but to her surprise Camiola did not make any movement, except to try to dry her eyes with her kerchief. For, in truth, much as Camiola dreaded meeting Romont just then, she dreaded still more leaving him and Mrs. Pollen together. She knew that Mrs. Pollen's friendship for her would see in all this but a new chance for Romont, and would prompt her to tell him so.

Romont came in, and Mrs. Pollen talked with him a little about things in general, and then she went out of the room. "Better leave them to themselves," she thought. Of course, Romont must have seen that something had happened.

"I am going to stay with Mrs. Pollen for a while in town," Camiola said, trembling as she tried to seem quite at her ease. "They are in trouble at the rectory; Georgie is going back to Egypt at once."

"Oh! Then you won't care much for visitors just now." He was about to go.

"You have been always very kind and considerate to me," she said in rather oblique answer to his words and his movement. "I shall not forget it."

"Why should I worry you? You have trouble enough just now, I dare say. I would rather relieve you of worry than put more on you. I can wait." He spoke the last words significantly.

"I can't promise," she said; "I don't see my way. You must not wait with any idea of *that* kind. It can't be—ever."

"All the same, I can wait, and I do wait. You shall do as you

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think right. It will come out all right in the end. You shall do with me what you will."

"I wish I could do one thing with you," she said timidly; she was not often timid.

"What is it? You can do anything with me; you know that."

"I wish I could make you happy."

"You can.'

"Ah, but not in that way. I can't do that." Her complexi was heightened as she spoke.

"I can wait," he said again, with a bright smile. "Don torment yourself thinking over all this thing; let it be as it wi Don't think about me—I am all right; I am perfectly happy, so far as I am concerned myself. It is a different thing about *you*."

"I feel so guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"I think he will be killed—I know he will; and I am the cause. His mother will never forgive me; she will hate me. I don't wonder; I couldn't blame her."

"But he would have had to go back to his duty even if you had promised to marry him. You wouldn't have married a man who wouldn't fight for his flag."

"Still, he would have gone away more contented, and his mother would have been satisfied with me; I should have done all that is in me to make them happy. Oh! I am very unhappy; and if anything should happen to him I shall never get over it."

"Let us hope that nothing will happen. Every fellow is not killed who goes into a battle; and these are not very big battles that our young friend is going into."

"You speak lightly——"

"Do I? Well, I don't feel lightly; I understand your feeling, and I couldn't think lightly about anything that concerns you. I should be only too glad to go in his place, if that would do you any good or bring you any ease of mind."

She looked at him reproachfully. "You ought not to say that," she said.

"Why not—if it would take this load of care and responsibility off your mind?"

"And put such fresh care and responsibility on it? As if I didn't care for——" She was going to say "for you;" but she stopped. "It is no use talking in this way."

"No; and I don't want to put you out in anything. When you want me—if ever you *do* want me—send for me—I shall be at your command—for ever and ever—Camiola."

On the lawn he met Mrs. Pollen.

"Well?" she asked impatiently.

"I am going for a run into the country—I think I ought to go and see my mother, dear old lady; she will be looking out for me about this time."

"Delightful to see how fond you young men get of your mothers

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when there is any occasion to make their existence an excuse for getting out of the way of something one is anxious to avoid."

"That isn't exactly my case," Romont said. "But, anyhow, I am awfully fond of my mother, Mrs. Pollen. I call her a dear old lady, but she really isn't any older than I, you know; and she is a good deal better looking, I can tell you."

"I like her immensely, although I never saw her; I always feel that I owe her a deep debt of gratitude for spoiling you. Look how well brought up these Lisles were! There are not two better people in the world than their father and mother; and I am sure they were nurtured on the noblest and strictest principles of high-class moral family education; and now see how some of them are turning out! Georgie is a selfish little beast; Alice, the child, is eaten up with morbid self-consciousness, and a craving to be adored by everybody. Janette is by far the best; and she, I am told, was always considered the spoilt child. When am I to know your mother; or am I ever to know her?"

"Whenever you like; she would be delighted."

"Come, would she now? Don't you be too sure of that, young man; don't you go rashly answering for your mother. You see, I am all very well in my way, but I am not much in the way that women like. You may have perhaps observed that women in general don't exactly take to me—don't quite tumble to me, if I may put it so. Well, you are going to see your mother, but you don't seem to me to be quite in the high spirits of a youth who was rushing off, fired by affection, to clasp a loved parent to his filial breast. Why do you look so gloomy over it?"

"Well, of course going out of London just now isn't a very pleasant thing for me——"

"No; then why do you do it?"

"I think I had better be away from this place for a while."

"I see. Yes, I think you had. That didn't occur to me at first. It might be troublesome for *her*."

"That is what I was thinking of."

"You are quite right. Until something definite happens it would be better for her that you kept out of the way. It is trying for you, of course——"

"I don't care about that. At least, I do care, but it shan't make any difference. What does it matter about me?"

"That comes of being spoiled," Mrs. Pollen said with a smile. "Give my tender regards to your mother. Good-bye. You are a good fellow, Bertie, and you may rest sure of one thing—that your cause shall not suffer in your absence. The dreadful old saying about the absent being always in the wrong shan't prevail against you."

"What I like about him," Mrs. Pollen said to Camiola afterwards, "is that there isn't one bit of the hero and the self-sacrificing martyr about him. He can do a manly thing without giving himself airs."

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CHAPTER XXXII.

ORANGE BLOSSOMS WITHER.

WALTER FITZURSE was quite determined to study hard and go in regularly for making a great position at the bar, in literature, and in Parliament. He would have to begin with the bar and literature. The Senate would come in good time. He was not yet quite certain as to the path of paramount distinction which he was to tread, but he did not think it was to the bar. "Gout and a peerage at fifty," Disraeli's definition of success in the law courts, did not seem exactly an enchanting prospect in his eyes or those of Janette; and neither one nor the other would for a moment have taken account of the fact that gout without the peerage is the more ordinary reward of severe legal studies. Janette yearned for some career for her husband which would have made him a leader of men towards the temple of brotherhood and peace; and it seemed to her that possibly a seat in Parliament might be the best vestibule to such a shrine.

Walter began by taking chambers at the Temple. A young man who had taken a set of rooms about twice too large for him agreed to let one-half and a share of a small clerk to Walter; and here was the first sod of the new career turned. Every morning regularly Walter went to his chambers; and at first he studied law. After a while he found law somewhat dry, and he read a French novel in order to refresh his mind. Then he felt inspired with poetic passion; and he began a poem full of wild emotion, of yearning to solve all the mysteries of man's destiny. He did not finish this. He strung his lyre to the theme of love; he got a certain way on in a piece of lyric effusiveness which it would never do to show to Janette. He drew several heads of women with wonderful masses of hair and divinely pencilled eyebrows; and he began to doubt whether, after all, Nature had not intended him for a painter or a sculptor. Then he found that it was quite time to go to the club and have some luncheon. He met one or two men at the club, and they smoked and played billiards; and Walter had to hurry away at last in order to get to his chambers in time to be found there by his wife. It was agreed between them that Janette should always call for him at the chambers at five o'clock. If she didn't come and carry him away, she said, she was sure he would stay there until dinner-time blinding his eyes with study. Then they would wander home together; and Walter would tell her of his studies and of his literary aspirations, and she was never weary of listening. Sometimes she was able to come in her father's carriage; and then indeed Walter was delighted with her. He was proud to drive through the streets of the West End in what he complacently called his wife's carriage. He made it stop at the club, where he told Janette he wanted to leave a message; and he

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would get out and keep Janette waiting a few minutes while he went inside and talked to one or two men, and perhaps one of the men would come out on the steps with him when he was going, and would take off his hat to Janette, and Janette would blush at the idea of being seen waiting for her husband—being seen to have a husband. And then Walter and she would go off together; and it would be hard to say which was the more proud, she of the husband, or he of the carriage. This was what the outer public saw. Camiola already saw something more.

"Beastly cad, that fellow," Captain Cannon observed one day to Mr. Montagu Broom, as the two stood on the steps of Walter's club, and saw Walter and his wife drive off.

"Oh, come, now, I don't go quite so far as that, don't you know," Mr. Montagu Broom replied, in gentle deprecation. Mr. Montagu Broom appeared to be one of Walter's closest friends at the club. It was a junior club, and was made up chiefly not of juniors, but of seniors who had not been able to procure admission to any other club. There were some disappointed old soldiers and a few unpromising young soldiers there; some amateur authors who, being able to give good dinners, occasionally brought real professional authors to dine there. A good many stockbrokers and other gentlemen from the city were enrolled on the books, and there were some hunting men from the shires, who liked the rather highly flavoured tone of the institution. The club was emphatic in everything. There were peculiarly gorgeous fur coats to be seen there in the winter, and the earliest and most startling white hats and white waistcoats in the summer. There was a common talk of deep play in connection with this club.

When Walter first had the happiness to be made a member, he was under the impression that he was received into one of the most fashionable and exclusive coteries of the metropolis. Mr. Montagu Broom was one of the city men; he had no end of money to spend.

"Don't think he's so bad as all that," Mr. Broom pleaded. "He don't quite know his way about yet; but he will in time. He's a deuced smart fellow. Got a lot of money with his wife, I'm told. She's an awfully pretty girl, though a trifle pale for my taste."

"Told he hasn't got a penny," Captain Cannon said sententiously. "She comes of a good family, I hear."

"*He* does too," Mr. Broom observed.

"Don't you believe it. Mark my words, sir; that fellow is a cad; a cad and a sweep."

Now Captain Cannon was a man of good family, who had somehow got at odds with his good family and with fortune generally. Mr. Montagu Broom was a man who had come up from nobody knew what, and had probably taken the name of Montagu Broom for what Mr. Kinglake calls "the sake of euphony." Mr. Broom, therefore, was anxious to make out that all his friends were men of good family; Captain Cannon was always prompted by some mysterious impulse to question their right to that distinction.

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Walter and Janette drove away proud and happy, in ignorance of the discussion that was going on about them between the two eminent members of the club. Even if Walter had heard the whole debate, every word, he would not have been displeased. He would, on the contrary, have been highly gratified. He would have taken it as a tribute to his importance; the disparaging comments would have become in that sense a sort of panegyric. It was something to be talked about; if one is not praised, the next best thing is to be censured. To be ignored is the worst fate that can befall. This was Walter's unwritten creed; he never could see such real difference between notoriety and fame. He knew people talked about him now a good deal, and he was delighted.

Camiola was wandering purposeless on the lawn at Fitzurse House the first day of her stay—the day of her arrival. She came on Christian Pilgrim.

"Mr. Pilgrim! I have not seen you for a long time—a very long time. I hope you are well." She held out her hand.

Pilgrim at first was confused and awkward. He had not spoken to her, he had hardly ever seen her, since the day when, carried away by a wild passion, he made such a foolish figure of himself. He did not like to think of that now. He had no doubt in his mind that Romont was in love with her, and he could not but believe that she must be in love with Romont. No one could help loving *her*, he thought, but he could not now understand how any force of passion could have made a man like him, poor elderly Christian Pilgrim, proclaim such a love to such a woman. She was looking pale and not happy; a shade of melancholy made her more beautiful than ever in poor Pilgrim's eyes. It made her seem more like the kind of divinity he would have worshipped—had often worshipped in his dreams of night and dreams of day—a being in woman's form, full of divine sympathy with all the trials and sadnesses of mortals.

"It is a long time," he timidly said; and then stammered out, "I hope you have forgiven me, Miss Sabine?"

"Oh yes; long since. Let us not speak of that, Mr. Pilgrim, it was nothing; I said then I forgave it."

"It was so wrong of me, I so forgot myself, and I didn't know then half how good you were."

"I don't want to think any more about it. I am not angry; we will forget it and be friends."

Another girl would have hastily passed on and left him with the conviction that she still was offended with him, and so kept his pain all the longer alive. But Camiola never, when she could, did anything by halves, and she had an instinctive perception that if Mr. Pilgrim and she were to be good friends again they must begin at once, and she must put him on the footing of friendship from that moment. So she stopped in her walk and showed that she was inclined to get into talk with him.

"Vinnie Lammas is so grateful to you," he said after a moment. "She is never done saying how much she owes to you."

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"Vinnie! oh, I am very fond of Vinnie. She has a true little heart and a tender nature, and I hope she will be very happy. Oh, here comes Mr. Fitzurse."

Walter Fitzurse indeed was seen lounging up one of the walks from the gate with that air of general ownership of everything which was among his many impressive qualities. He looked a little surprised at seeing Camiola and Pilgrim in seemingly close conference. Walter was all for the brotherhood and equality of men when he was making eloquent speeches for Janette's ear; but his personal feeling was, that fellows like Pilgrim ought to keep their distance. He made a most graceful bow to Camiola, and tried to be at once friendly, dignified, and condescending with Pilgrim. Pilgrim turned abruptly away.

"I do not know how it is, Miss Sabine, but I have an instinctive consciousness when men dislike me. I am sure our poor friend Pilgrim does not like me."

Camiola was wondering whether the same instinctive consciousness served him in the case of women. She had always disliked him. She had distrusted him from the very first moment. His presence constrained and chilled her. She could talk freely to almost every one she met except to him. Lately she had come to have better reason for her dislike than before, for she could see that he cared nothing for Janette, and that he was growing tired even of pretending to adore her. Camiola had seen this so clearly, that she almost felt tempted to assume a right on the ground of her friendship with Janette, and remonstrate with him. Even for his own sake she had sometimes thought it might be well to do this, for assuredly, if Janette's father and mother found that there was any cause for complaint, they would resent it. But she had shrunk from doing anything that would seem to bring her too much into his confidence.

"I don't think Mr. Pilgrim is a man of many dislikes," she said coldly; "he always seems to me a kind-hearted and a just man."

"Your kind-hearted and just people can have their dislikes, I can assure you. But I can see that you would find it hard to understand such feelings; you are far above narrow jealousies and spites."

"I am sure I am not half so far above them as Mr. Pilgrim is; I never saw any jealousy or spite in him."

"You are too good to see——"

"Oh, I don't care for insipid goodness of that kind. If you mean that for a compliment, Mr. Fitzurse, it doesn't attract me at all. How is Janette?"

"I would much rather talk about you than about Janette. Janette and I get on very well; but I have not found her all that—well, that a man whom you honoured with your love would find in you."

Camiola lost her temper. She had heard something like this before.

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"You tell this to me," she said; "to me, the nearest friend of your wife; to me, who love Janette better, far better than myself! You come to me, her friend and sister, more than sister, and you hint your complaints of her, and you try to excuse yourself for not understanding her, and you think I can listen to such stuff! You have taken her out of her happy home where her people adored her; you have brought her into anger with them for the first time in all their lives, and now you go on as if—well, to be sure—she was not quite worthy of your sublime attention."

"It was all done in great haste," he said; "we hardly knew what we were doing."

"She didn't know what she was doing," Camiola exclaimed in generous anger. "I did; yes, I never believed that she was doing a good thing for herself; I never trusted you."

"I can forgive anything you say to me, because it shows the nobleness of your friendship for her. How generous and brave you are, Miss Sabine."

"Generous and brave, because I stand up for my dear, darling Janette? What sort of women can you have known, Mr. Fitzurse, if you call that generous and brave?"

"Women generally are not quite so devoted to other women, I have always heard. But you can afford to be generous, you can have no fear of rivalry anywhere."

"Rivalry—in what?"

"Well, in the world's admiration, I suppose."

"Were we talking about the world's admiration? What do I know about the world? What have I to do with its admiration?"

"Our own little world is *the* world to all of us; and in that world you have its whole admiration. Who that knows you does not admire you?"

She grew red and hot, and she did not want to show too much anger. He was becoming dangerously, odiously complimentary in his words and his way of putting them, and Camiola was especially anxious not to show any perception of such a meaning.

"Thank you," she said quietly, "that is very kind of you. I do like a great many people, and I am glad if they like me; but we were talking about Janette."

"You have the love of all the men who know you, I think," he said in a sort of dreamy way, as if he were only talking aloud. "I verily believe poor Pilgrim adores the ground you tread on."

This was said in such a way as to make it seem a mere playful and harmless allusion. Walter began, indeed, to be afraid that he had gone rather too far.

"Very few men whose respect and regard I should value more than I do Mr. Pilgrim's. But I wanted to say something about Janette, Mr. Fitzurse; I shouldn't have begun this talk only for you. But as you did begin it I think I must say something."

He shrugged his shoulders melodramatically.

"I know what you want to say; I can guess it; and I know that everything you say will be just and right."

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

SPECTRAL ILLUSIONS.

CAMIOLA was preparing hastily in her own mind quite an eloquent and impressive, while at the same time highly politic and ingenious, little speech, in reply to Fitzurse's invitation. She intended to appeal to him on behalf of Janette and of himself, to try to bring him to a sense of the foolishness as well as the ingratitude of the part he was playing, and at the same time to evade all admission of any meaning in his style of compliment to herself. She would not condescend to acknowledge that she believed there was any sinister intent in his words of compliment, or to notice them as compliments at all. We do not know what effect the eloquence and ingenuity of the speech might have produced on Walter if it had been spoken; but it was not spoken. Mrs. Pollen coming out of the house interrupted the conversation.

Camiola had been waiting for Mrs. Pollen, who was to return to town for the evening; she had been wandering, as we have said, purposeless on the lawn while Mrs. Pollen was making her preparations.

"Oh! you are here?" Mrs. Pollen said, in not too gracious recognition of Walter's presence. "I didn't expect to see you on this side of the water. How did you tear yourself away from the fascinations of the West End? How are all the countesses and marchionesses? How will they get on without you?"

Fitzurse smiled a rather feeble sort of smile. He did not like to be chaffed, especially before a pretty girl. "I don't know; we are not much acquainted with marchionesses and countesses; we are very quiet people."

"We? who are we?"

"Well, Janette and I, of course."

"To be sure. I had quite forgotten Janette." This was said with a significance which made Walter turn pale. He could not afford to lose his temper with Mrs. Pollen, or he would then have lost his temper most assuredly. What Mrs. Pollen meant him to understand was, "I had forgotten to think of Janette as a being inseparable from you." He quite understood her meaning. "Well, how is Janette, as you have mentioned her?"

"She is very well, thank you."

"Camiola dear, we are going directly. Will you get your things on?"

Camiola disappeared into the house, glad to escape, yet feeling as if she ought to have delivered her speech.

"You couldn't guess, perhaps, why I came over to Fitzurse House so soon," Walter said, with a desperate attempt to seem at his ease.

If the attempt had not been so evidently made, Mrs. Pollen might,

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perhaps, not have known quite so quickly that he was not at his ease. "I dare say I could guess if I tried. Shall I try?"

"If you please. I should be curious to know if you really could guess."

"By the way, I don't guess, in that sense of the word—in your sense. I never could guess anything in that way; I see things, and I draw conclusions. Well, suppose I say that you came over to see about my Albanian, Joseph?"

This was a bold shot of Mrs. Pollen's, but its very boldness would in any case have served her purpose. If Walter had not been thinking of Joseph, the mere mention of his name would convey to him the idea that in Mrs. Pollen's mind there was some reason why he should be thinking of Joseph, and thus set his alarms all going once again. If, on the other hand, he had come to ask something about Joseph, the correctness of her conclusions could not but impress him. It did impress him. Mrs. Pollen was right; he had come in the hope to find out something about Joseph. Joseph was his spectre; Joseph unseen was even worse than Joseph seen. A great actor produced a fine effect by making Hamlet, after he has first seen the ghost, glance round him every other moment with uneasy eyes, expecting the awful presence again, and disturbed by the absence not less than by the apparition. Walter's mind was thus wrought on by the absence of the Albanian. Joseph was absent indeed for this moment; but when might he not be present again, and for what purpose?

Mrs. Pollen, it must be owned, found a certain unchristian pleasure in observing and working upon Walter's feelings and his fears. She had been hearing bad stories about him in the West End lately, and she was becoming pitiless so far as he was concerned, while very pitiful indeed for Janette.

"Yes, it was about Joseph," Fitzurse answered with seeming carelessness. He was becoming master of himself. "The fact is, I understood from you that you did not feel quite certain about keeping him on; and I was talking to some men, and I didn't know if I might not be in the way of placing him well, if you would like to have him placed here in London."

"Would you think of employing him yourself?" she asked, and she fixed her eyes on him.

"I? Oh, well—I couldn't afford, you know. Why do you ask?"

"If you could take him into your service it might not be a bad thing. Joseph is a peculiar sort of person; he is very faithful to his master; he has all the devotion of the wolf-dog or the blood-hound. If I had committed a murder—or tried to commit one—I should feel perfectly safe in letting Joseph know all about it—so long as he was in my service. But I should try not to lose him if he had such a secret of mine in his keeping. He has some capital qualities—that is why I think it might not be half a bad thing if you were to employ him—always supposing he would have you as a master He might not, perhaps."

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Mrs. Pollen must have been far less keen-sighted than she was if she had not noted the effect which her words, sent as a mere shot in the darkness, wrought on their victim. Walter turned a livid pale and positively trembled. His eyes were lit by a blue light of fear, and anger, and something like hate.

"What on earth can this be?" Mrs. Pollen meanwhile was asking of her own mind. "He can't have been doing any murder, surely? He can't have been trying to kill somebody? Yet I have certainly made a hit in that direction."

"Mrs. Pollen, I really don't understand you. I don't even pretend to understand you."

"Don't you? Pretend that you cannot understand me! There —I should like to see you do *that*. Just look me straight in the face and say you don't understand me; that you have not the least idea of what I mean! That will do. You would never make a decent amateur actor; you will never be as good as Bertie Romont at that sort of business either."

Walter started at the mention of Romont's name.

"Bertie Romont is a very good amateur actor," she went on. "I couldn't get things out of him as easily as I can out of you. So, then, he knows all about it too? We are quite a *partie carrée*: you and I, and Joseph and Romont! Well, if a secret confided to three persons besides him whom it specially concerns can be kept for ever, the world is growing less communicative than it used to be in my younger days, and the reeds now would never blab the secret of King Midas! You want to know, I suppose, why I have brought all this up just now?"

He only nodded his head. He was quite overmastered for the moment.

"I'll tell you. I have been hearing bad tales about you. I don't know that your wife complains of you as yet, but she has reason to complain. Now, mind; I told you before that your love —I mean your love for Janette—would be the best title of your ambition to success. We have given you an amnesty for the past, some of us who know; but it is conditional, not absolute. Don't provoke us, and everything may go on well with you still. But, remember, the amnesty is conditional, and there are three people, as well as yourself, in the secret. There—that will do for the present. I am sorry we have to return to town so quickly, Miss Sabine and I. Miss Sabine is going to stay with me in town for the present. We shall see you, of course, and Janette? The carriage is ready, Camiola dear."

Camiola had returned. As she said good-bye to Walter she held his hand for one little second, as if in a kind of mute appeal. She longed to make her little speech to him about Janette, to plead for Janette's happiness, to warn him that he would do himself and her only harm if he set people thinking that he neglected her. But there was no chance to speak the little speech now, and perhaps, after all, she could do no good by speaking it. She took

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her hand away, and a moment after Walter found himself alone on the lawn of Fitzurse House in a condition of semi-stupefaction.

Now if we might venture on the frivolity of asking any reader to play a sort of game with us, we should like to ask that reader what he or she thinks was the first distinct sensation in Walter Fitzurse's mind when he began to pull himself together and collect his ideas out of the muddle of mere stupefaction. If this story has at all succeeded in conveying a clear idea of Walter's nature, ways, and temperament, the answer ought to be easy. The first sensation of which he was conscious was the thought that Camiola had taken leave of him with a peculiar pressure of the hand. The kindly, generous, self-forgetful impulse which moved her to give that half-unconscious pressure, the impulse which, translated into words, would have said, "Oh, before it is too late—for her sake and your own sake; for the sake of those who love her, and those who at least wish you well, take thought and do not throw away her love"—that impulse was for the moment wholly misunderstood by Fitzurse. To him it was evidence of a certain tender interest in him. It was part of his creed that every woman, however well meaning and well brought up, loves praise, and even flattery, and is open to the influence of any words from any man which profess admiration and love. There are men who make it their creed that women are all turned out by nature on precisely the same pattern, like Nuremburg tin soldiers; that know one and you know all; and that the touch of nature which makes the whole woman-world kin is sensibility to admiration and to professions of love. Above every other feeling in his mind now there soared the exulting thought that he had made love to Camiola, and that Camiola had been touched by his words. That slight momentary pressure of the hand made a bond of sentiment between them, he thought. His vanity was inflated, and soared with him into the very skies.

He passed out of the gates of Fitzurse House. Of course, as he walked along the sense of his danger came back on him. He did not doubt any longer that Mrs. Pollen knew his whole secret—Mrs. Pollen who, as she drove off with Camiola, was unusually silent, perplexing herself with conjectures as to what Walter could possibly have done, or tried to do, which made him so much affrighted when the dial which spoke not "made shrewd sign and pointed full upon the stroke of murder." Well, he must be more careful for the future. It was clear that he was safe in Mrs. Pollen's hands so long as he was properly loving and attentive to Janette; and he would be properly loving and attentive to Janette for the future. Joseph of course was a danger; but somehow he fancied that Mrs. Pollen meant to convey the idea that she could keep Joseph safely in hand if only he, Walter, did not provoke her wrath against him. After all, what was it that could be brought against him? He had not done any murder; a sudden act of passion ending in nothing could not come to much even if brought against him. He had not

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stolen any money; it was only at the very worst an inference that he had ever intended to steal; and he knew that he never had any such intention; he always meant to pay back the money again. He was becoming cheered and consoled in mind. Oh yes; it would be all right. He would return to his devotion for dear, sweet Janette who loved him so; he would absolutely get out of the flirtation with Lady Pallas; evidently Mrs. Pollen had been hearing of *that;* that was what she meant by the bad tales people had been telling her, and by her allusion to countesses and marchionesses. He would be very attentive to Janette for the future; and in his mind there was the sweetening thought that after all Camiola Sabine would be a good deal with Janette now that she was going over to London to stay with Mrs. Pollen. Things began to look brighter and better for our young self-elected representative of the illustrious house of Fitzurse. It was a beautiful evening, too, as he walked along meditating.

The flirtation with Lady Pallas was a very harmless piece of business, so far as Lady Pallas was concerned. There was in Lady Pallas's mind no thought of harm, in the ordinary sense of the word. Scandal had never breathed a doubt of the purity of Lady Pallas's reputation. Only there can be an immense amount of pain wrought and evil done by ladies on whose moral character taint of suspicion has never fallen. Hearts may be broken and homes made unhappy by such ladies. Lady Pallas was the wife of the Earl of Pallas, a distinguished diplomatist, who had married somewhat late in life. Lady Pallas liked to be talked of, and she liked to have men about her who were talked of, and she had taken very much to Walter Fitzurse after his romantic marriage. She was very friendly with Janette, and was amused by Janette's theories of life and her adoration of her husband, and Lady Pallas thought it would be good fun to make a victim of Walter and show him off as her victim. She was still young and handsome and attractive, and poor Walter felt all the devotion of his nature pour out to handsome women of rank. So he let Lady Pallas make a fool of him while thinking in his own mind that he was a very splendid figure in society; and Janette was already beginning to suffer and to let her suffering be seen, which gratified Lady Pallas immensely.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OLD WOUNDS—HEALING.

THE evening was already beginning to fade as Walter turned from Fitzurse House. The summer itself was fading into autumn. Soon the season would be all over; it was now in its latest embers. Walter had been invited to go down into the country with Lord and Lady Pallas; but now he thought he would not go, although he longed to see one of the country houses of the class whom Dr.

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Johnson would have called the great. But it would be better not, he thought; on the whole much better not. Janette would not like it, and would be jealous; poor dear Janette! He could not help smiling complacently to himself at the thought of Janette being jealous about him and the attentions paid to him by a great lady. The evening sun shed one of its latest rays across his smiling face.

He would not pass through the odious streets of Fitzurseham, and perhaps be grinned at by the envious inhabitants. It used to be at one time a favourite theory of Fitzursehamites that Walter was destined for greatness of some kind or other, and was certainly destined to rise in the world and get into good society. Yet, now that he had risen and got into good society, Fitzurseham did not appear to feel proud or gratified at his elevation, but, on the contrary, showed a disposition to grumble at him and jeer at him. We have already spoken of the Fitzurseham population as an irreverent population who would jeer at success as well as failure. In fact, there was no telling what Fitzurseham would not jeer at if it felt so disposed. One might be the glass of fashion and the mould of form, and yet a ragged, bandy-legged Fitzursehamite would be as likely as not to shoot out the tongue of derision at him and hold him up to public contempt. A Fitzursehamite *gamin* with dirty face, bare feet, and torn pantaloons never to be mended, would proclaim himself rigidly exacting in regard to female costume, and would make disparaging comments on the get-up of Mrs. Langtry if she happened to pass along his way and he disapproved of her bonnet or her dress. One might have saved the State, and yet if he happened to wander along a Fitzurseham street might find himself only an object of sincere contempt and loudly expressed ridicule. It is no wonder that Walter Fitzurse, an old resident who had cut the place, should have felt strong objection to parading its streets on foot in the evening.

He knew a way near the rectory and by the river-bank from which he could reach one of the piers of the river steamers without tempting much of the commentary of Fitzurseham. He was moving along this quiet path now when forming his resolve not to go to Lady Pallas's, and when the setting sun illumined his complacent smile and dazzled his eyes. Because of the dazzled eyes, he did not see that he was near running into the arms of a pair who were turning round a corner, a man and a woman. The woman was leaning on the man's arm, and they were in deep conversation. Walter might perhaps have passed on without noticing them further, but that they stopped in doubt or some confusion apparently; and then Walter looked at them and saw that they were Vinnie Lammas and Christian Pilgrim. Vinnie drew back a little disturbed; Pilgrim maintained his usual gloomy composure.

"Vinnie—Miss Lammas!" Walter exclaimed, taking off his hat and making a bow worthy of a prince doing salutation to a

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princess. "Pilgrim—how do again, Pilgrim? Lovely evening—going for a walk? Hope Mrs. Lammas is well?"

"Mamma is quite well, thank you," Vinnie said, with heart a little throbbing. Pilgrim could feel it throb against his arm. He withdrew his arm. "Mr. Pilgrim was kindly seeing me home. Mrs. Pollen has gone to town for the night."

"Yes, I know," Walter said; "I have just been there; I am going to town too. Good evening, Vinnie—Miss Lammas; good evening, Pilgrim. My kind regards to Mrs. Lammas."

Christian Pilgrim said never a word. Walter bowed again and moved off. But when the two had passed on he stopped for a while and looked after them. He became very curious to know whether Pilgrim would go into Vinnie's house with her and remain for any time there. He felt curious to know whether they were going straight to Vinnie's home, or whether a long walk by the river-side might not precede Vinnie's return to her mother. He had, one might have thought, his heart's desire. He had carried off and married the pretty granddaughter of an earl; he was carrying on a flirtation with the wife of an earl; he could still feel the momentary impress of Camiola Sabine's hand; and yet he suddenly felt a pang of jealous passion at the thought of Christian Pilgrim taking a walk with Vinnie Lammas, perhaps lingering with her by the river, accompanying her to her home, and going in and sitting with her in the room which Walter remembered so well, and of which the memory sometimes brought a feeling of regret and sometimes a shudder, according to the mood which happened to have possession of him. He felt devoured by curiosity to know whether Pilgrim would return at once to Fitzurse House, having seen Vinnie to her home, or whether he would go in with her and make a long stay. Braving all risk of being recognized and flouted by jibing Fitzursehamites, he followed slowly the path Pilgrim and Vinnie had taken. He kept them in view all the time until he saw that they were close to Vinnie's house. Then he fell back a little and waited. There was a beetle-browed archway forming the entrance to a narrow lane which led in a crooked and curving way into one of the meanest and squalidest parts of Fitzurseham, parts which Walter had never penetrated. In the shadow of the archway the young man stood and waited and watched. An hour passed, and Pilgrim did not come out of Vinnie's house. Walter could wait no longer; he had to return home. His projects of moral and philosophical reform were disturbed by what he had observed; his mind was disturbed by it. He could not bear the idea of Christian Pilgrim, on whom he had always looked down, coming now to supplant him in the heart of Vinnie Lammas. It would have pleased him if the girl had always remained faithful to the memory of her first lover. It appeared to him as if Pilgrim were doing him a positive wrong. He was vexed, and felt humbled. It was too much, he said to himself; he wasn't going to stand it.

Meanwhile, Christian Pilgrim was spending a quiet and happy

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hour or two with Vinnie Lammas and her mother. He was having tea with them, after the old fashion of the kindly days before Vinnie had been disappointed in love. Things, indeed, were gradually restoring themselves to the old condition of quietude and something like contentment in Vinnie's house. Mrs. Lammas was delighted with the improved fortunes of her daughter, with the friends she had made and the prospect that seemed to be opening up to her. All that was wanted to make them both happy now was that Vinnie should forget altogether her love for Walter Fitzurse; and Mrs. Lammas thought with much secret satisfaction that this seemed very likely to come to pass. Mr. Pilgrim was undoubtedly very attentive to Vinnie, and although it was so far in a fatherly sort of way, yet Mr. Pilgrim was not nearly so old as he looked, and he had a very good position as manager of Mrs. Pollen's property, and Mrs. Pollen made no secret of her regard for him, and her willingness to do anything in her power to help him to gain any object he had in view; and there was no handsome young admirer now to put into contrast with him; and, in short, Mrs. Lammas had made up her mind that Pilgrim would, some time or other, ask Vinnie to marry him, and that, on the whole, Vinnie could not do a better thing. Therefore she saw with pleasure that the two seemed day by day to grow more friendly, more intimate, more necessary to each other; and she waited in quiet confidence for the moment when Vinnie would come to her and tell her that Pilgrim and she were going to be married.

Vinnie was indeed becoming day by day more necessary to Christian Pilgrim. By imperceptible degrees his friendship for the girl, his compassion for her, his sympathy with her, were deepening and broadening into a tenderer feeling. After his one wild outbreak of passion about Miss Sabine, he had fallen into a condition of mental dejection and shame which for a time made life almost unbearable. He had been roused out of the depth of this depression for the first time by the shock of Vinnie Lammas's attempt at suicide. In his anxiety about her and his pity for her, he forgot for a while himself and what he considered his degradation, and he began to feel grateful to the girl because she had made him think of her and not of himself. When Vinnie became part of the establishment at Fitzurse House, Pilgrim was constantly directed by Mrs. Pollen to see the girl home and to take care of her generally, Mrs. Pollen having her own views and purposes about both of them. So it came that Pilgrim renewed his old intimacy with the mother and daughter, but under conditions very much changed and in a frame of mind very much changed also.

"Don't you think Vinnie is looking much better, Mr. Pilgrim?" Mrs. Lammas asked, when Vinnie had left the room for a moment to see about the tea.

"She is indeed greatly changed for the better," Pilgrim said. "I was afraid she would have a shock to-day. Do you know that we met *him*?"

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"Met whom, Mr. Pilgrim?"

Mrs. Lammas was a little slow of apprehension. She really did not know at the moment of what "him" Christian was speaking.

"That young man—Walter Fitzurse. I don't know what he was doing about here. Yes, he stopped and spoke to her."

"My! I am surprised. How did Vinnie bear it?"

"Very well; she did not seem to mind so much as I was afraid she would."

"I *am* so glad. But I am sure she wouldn't." Mrs. Lammas expressed this conviction quite as much for the purpose of reassuring herself as of assuring Pilgrim. "She don't care about him any more, Mr. Pilgrim; she will soon forget him altogether, I hope."

"I hope so too." Pilgrim hoped, but was not very confident. He thought Vinnie had borne the meeting very well; but he had seen, too, how the crimson flush came over her face, and how she trembled; and little as he knew of women and their ways, he knew enough to know that Vinnie had not yet got over all her love for Walter Fitzurse.

Nothing more was said then. Vinnie came back, and they had tea and talked pleasantly over various things quite as in the old time. Vinnie was in what seemed to be remarkably high spirits. Pilgrim was delighted with her mood and her ways. He was getting very fond of the girl in a half-fatherly, half-loverlike sort of way. When he was going, Vinnie came out with him to the door-step, just as she used to do in the old time—with him and of course with Walter too. There, just in front of them, were the windows of the house where Walter used to live. Vinnie's eyes turned that way with a look which would have filled with misgiving the heart of an admirer more skilled in reading the mood of a woman than poor Christian Pilgrim. It was a tender and beautiful autumn evening; the mild light of the "Shepherd's Star" fell on Vinnie's pale upturned face and eyes, now wistful and melancholy.

"It was strange, wasn't it?—meeting him to-day," she said suddenly, sinking her voice as if there were any one but Pilgrim to hear her words.

"You bore it very well," Pilgrim said encouragingly; "I was glad to see that, Vinnie. You will be quite strong in time; and you will be happy."

She remained silent, looking still at the windows of the house which she once used to watch with so affectionate an interest. Her silence made Pilgrim feel a little uneasy. It was as if a damp cloud had suddenly come over his prospect.

"Yes; you bore it well," he said once again. "That was the first time you saw him—since that Sunday?"

"Yes; at least no, not exactly. I saw him once before."

Vinnie spoke with great hesitation now. In truth, she had almost thought at first of saying "Yes" in an unqualified way to

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Pilgrim's question; but, to do her justice, she always tried to be a truthful girl.

"Saw him once before—since that time, do you mean?"

"Yes, Mr. Pilgrim; I saw him once before."

"Where was that, Vinnie? Tell me about that. I didn't know anything of it. Where did you see him?"

"Here—I mean, of course, in Fitzurseham; it was quite by accident. I never thought of meeting him."

"Here, in Fitzurseham? Where in Fitzurseham?"

"In the old churchyard. I went in there one day when I was going from mamma's to Fitzurse House; and I stayed a few moments alone; and then he came in."

"And he talked to you?"

"Yes, Mr. Pilgrim; he talked to me."

"What did he talk to you about?"

"Oh, asked me to forgive him, and that. It didn't last long—I wouldn't stay. He said he was very sorry about me; and, do you know, he had never heard until that moment that I tried to kill myself?" This was said in a woman's last despairing effort to try and make people believe that her faithless lover was not, after all, quite so bad as they might have thought him.

Pilgrim's heart sank.

"You never told me of this, Vinnie," he said gloomily.

"No," she said in a despondent voice, "I didn't. What would be the good? It didn't matter. It couldn't make any change."

"Does your mother know?"

"She does not. I didn't tell her. I was afraid it would make her feel uncomfortable. She would be fancying things."

"Fancying things! Yes, very likely," Pilgrim thought. He could not help fancying things as he looked now into Vinnie's troubled face. "You didn't see him again after that—until to-day?" he asked.

"No, not until to-day. It was all a mere accident. He doesn't come here much now—to Fitzurseham, I mean. I don't suppose I shall ever see him again."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"IF ONLY HE COMES BACK."

A DARK cloud had fallen on the lonely rectory. Weeks had dragged on. Georgie was gone back to Egypt, in his parting moments raving to his mother about his disappointment and his love, and gloomily giving her to understand that he would put himself in the way of the first Arab spear that came within his range of vision. Janette never came near the place now. She was beginning to have some reasons of her own for a reluctance to meet her mother and be questioned perhaps about Walter. Camiola had gone, in grief and almost in anger, never, Lady Letitia supposed, to come

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back again. The poor lady sometimes asked herself impatiently what she had done that Heaven should use her thus. She had never meant anything but for the best; she could not see even yet that she had in any way done wrong; and yet this was what came of all. Her pain was increased by the conviction that her husband somehow blamed her in his heart. Mr. Lisle certainly did not show this in his manner; at least, he did not show any anger; but in his looks there was a certain compassionate tenderness that seemed to Lady Letitia like a resolve to spare her any reproach in her desolate condition. There did not seem much to live for now. If she were dead Mr. Lisle would grieve for her, but he would have his ministrations to attend to, and the poor of Fitzurseham to look after; and the world would go its way even for him much the same as before. Every day she expected to hear that the Arab spear-point had found her boy.

Alice clung to her mother, sometimes wearying her with talk which was not sympathetic. "How could the poor child be expected to enter into my feelings?" Lady Letitia asked herself.

One day as they were walking up and down the lawn, awaiting Mr. Lisle's return, Alice suddenly clasped her mother's hand and said—

"Mamma, don't you think we are very happy now, you and I together here? Don't you think we are?" She looked eagerly into her mother's face. Lady Letitia was surprised by the question.

"I hope you are always happy, my little Alice. You are too young to be anything but happy. When people are not young they are seldom quite happy."

"Oh, but I was unhappy, ever so unhappy, lots of times, almost always, I think, until now. But ain't you very happy now?"

"Well, my dear, you know poor Georgie is away, and he may be in danger; and then we don't see Janette; and Camiola is gone for the present, and I am sometimes uneasy."

"Yes, but that is why I like it, that's why I am so happy. I have you all to myself, and you have only me to be fond of, and I don't want anybody ever to come back; I would so much rather have you and me all day together—and you fond of me."

The poor troubled mother looked into the child's face, sparkling as it was with all the happiness of sated and morbid egotism, and there was something in it and in the whole condition of things that positively frightened her, and she burst into tears.

One morning there came a telegram for her with news that made her draw a deep breath. Georgie was one of those ordered off on an expedition into the enemy's country to retrieve a disaster which had lately befallen some of the British forces there. It was a perilous business; and its fate would soon be decided. Georgie sent his love to his father and her. No word of Camiola. Poor Lady Letitia felt a thrill of relief at this. Perhaps if—if—if he survived he would forget his unhappy love.

She handed the telegram to Mr. Lisle.

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"He will be killed," she said, with blanched face.

Mr. Lisle's lips trembled.

"Our boy is in the hands of God," was all he said; "like the sons of other fathers and mothers, Letitia."

"It is a wicked war," she said from between her clenched teeth, not knowing anything about the matter, but glad to be able to denounce something.

That same morning Mrs. Pollen and Camiola were at breakfast in Dover Street. Mrs. Pollen had been thinking and talking of going abroad somewhere and taking Camiola with her; but the project was put off from day to day. Camiola was reluctant to go anywhere away from London just at present, and Mrs. Pollen was not particularly anxious to change her ground now.

"People are fond of saying," she complacently observed, "that it is better to be half an hour too early for a train than half a minute too late. I don't think so, Camiola; I much prefer to be half a minute too late."

"But then you lose the train and you can't go!"

"Exactly, dear. Just think what a relief that is! I wish I had lost most of the trains I ever succeeded in catching, and then I couldn't have gone to the places."

Mrs. Pollen took up the newspaper and began reading it. Now it is a rather remarkable fact that, although Mrs. Pollen had such a gift of getting at other people's feelings, and could play a part with such skill and success when she made up her mind for it, she was not very good at concealing her own sudden emotions. Her deep dark eyes had too much expression in them not to betray their owner when the owner was off her guard. Camiola saw at once that there was some news in the paper which Mrs. Pollen did not wish her to see.

"There is something in the paper—about Georgie! Oh, please let me see."

"It says nothing about Georgie," Mrs. Pollen answered, "and there has been no fighting; it only talks of military preparations that you wouldn't understand any more than I do. I hate all that jargon about zerebras and Mudirs and stuff. Can't they write plain English? There is some talk of the cholera along the Riviera again, I see. It is just as well we didn't go anywhere in that direction just yet, Camiola."

"Please let me see the paper," Camiola pleaded. "I know there is something in it that I ought to see. Don't mind about me, Mrs. Pollen. I shan't make a fool of myself; I can stand bad news."

"Well, I don't know that this is to be considered bad news, as yet, anyhow; it is only a movement; and I have known so many soldiers come back all right out of the most terrible wars, that I have rather got into the way of thinking the battle-field about the safest place one's friends could be in. There, dear, read for yourself, and see if you can understand it."

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Camiola took the paper and read the telegraphic despatch with enforced composure. She did not like the idea of being regarded as a more or less hysterical girl.

"Oh yes," she said quietly; "I understand it all quite well. Georgie's battalion is ordered on an expedition which is very dangerous, and we shall know what happens very soon. While we are talking here the thing may be decided, and the worst may have come. We can only sit and wait until the news comes."

"Camiola," Mrs. Pollen said tenderly, "that is indeed the cruel doom of women in the world; we have to sit and wait while the fate of those we love is being decided far away. If you could only know how many times I have sat and waited in the same way! And for all that I said just now, my dear, one never gets used to it; oh no, never!" Her mind went back to many such trials. She had been about the world much, and had waited with sickening heart for the news from many a battle-field.

"There is only one thing I can do," Camiola said, "and I must do that at once. I must go to Lady Letitia."

"I don't think I would do that," Mrs. Pollen said gravely.

"Oh, why not? Surely my place is with her—while this is going on? We must know all in a day or two. I ought to be with her and try to keep her up; she will be glad of my company. I was very near being his wife; I was very fond of him; I feel as if I were her daughter."

"Well, my dear, I shan't put myself in the way if you feel that you ought to be with her. Only I still think you ought not to go unless you are prepared—unless you have made up your mind——" Mrs. Pollen stopped short.

"Made up my mind to do what?"

"To marry Georgie—if he comes back all right."

"Dear Mrs. Pollen, I *have* made up my mind; of course I have, I will tell Lady Letitia so. You know I offered to marry him up to the very last, if he liked."

"There is nothing more to be said," Mrs. Pollen grimly observed, and added, "He'll come back again all right, you'll see."

"You say that," Camiola interposed reproachfully, "almost as if you would be sorry if he did come back."

Mrs. Pollen was silent. She did not particularly care about Georgie Lisle, it must be owned, and she did care about Romont, and it seemed to her that a man more or a man less killed in battle was not a matter of great concern, except to the immediate relatives and friends of each fallen hero.

"You are angry with me," Camiola pleaded, trying another tack.

"Well, yes, I think I am. You know I always detested the thought of your marrying Georgie Lisle. I am thinking about your happiness, Camiola, and the happiness of some one else who loves you, and who is worth forty battalions of Georgie Lisles; and, good gracious, what an army that would be! But I dare say my anger will have quite passed away long before you get to Lady

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Letitia; and, mind, I must have you back here again as soon as you hear that Georgie is all right, and has killed a hundred and ninety-five Arabs with his own hand—including six false prophets, each giving himself out to be the real Mahdi. Well, when that news comes I want you back again; I am not going to give you up altogether to Lady Letitia any more. You must have the carriage; would you like my Albanian, Joseph, to go as your escort?"

Camiola knew that her cheek was growing red at the suggestion.

"Dear Mrs. Pollen," she said in appealing remonstrance, "if I didn't know that you had the kindest heart of any woman in the world, I should think you were making sport with my trouble and poor Lady Letitia's."

"I take it all back, dear," Mrs. Pollen said, and she kissed the girl, "but you provoked me." So the two friends parted, each well understanding the other. Camiola knew only too well why Mrs. Pollen was provoked by her; and Mrs. Pollen was only fighting the cause of Camiola's heart and of her love against Camiola herself.

An hour after this Camiola ran into Lady Letitia's arms, and the two women were in tears together, tears of sympathy and affection, and anxious, sad foreboding.

"You see, I have come back to you after all," Camiola said, with needless exposition of an obvious fact.

"You heard of our trouble, and you came," Lady Letitia said.

"Your trouble is my trouble, dearest Lady Letitia; if you are to be left without a son, I am to be left without a husband."

Lady Letitia pressed her hand with a tender emphasis. She knew what Camiola meant, and she was grateful.

"But he will come back all right; I know he will come back," Camiola insisted cheerily, in manner at least. "He will be spared to us both."

"If he could see us now," Lady Letitia murmured, "it would make him happy. It would make him wish to live." She began to shed tears once again at the thought that he did not know, and not knowing did not wish to live, and would therefore seek out his death; which if he did know he might even still avoid.

"He will do his duty like a brave man," Camiola said.

"Yes, I suppose so." Lady Letitia shuddered at the thought of what it meant to do one's duty in such a place and in such a struggle. Certainly she would not have wished Georgie to shirk his duty. But how happy were the mothers who had sons in whose way such duty did not come!

Mr. Lisle came in and welcomed Camiola cordially, but did not make too much of her coming; took it as if it were quite natural that she should bring her visit to Mrs. Pollen to an end at a time when her nearer friends were in some trouble. Mr. Lisle did not make much of the trouble either. He had braced his mind up to bear it. Georgie was a soldier, and had to go to the battle-field when he was summoned there; and if he must lose his life, it was

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to be lost in the way of duty. Mr. Lisle risked his own life and the lives that were far dearer to him every day, as he visited some of the fever-dens and small-pox dens of Fitzurseham. They dined quietly, and as if nothing in particular were going on; and they talked of things in general. It was only when the two women were alone that they came back at once to their trouble, and talked of nothing else. Every moment Lady Letitia started and looked anxiously around her. She was on the watch for the sound of the bell at the gate, which might announce a telegram with news from the battle-field. The air was surcharged with electricity; a growl of distant thunder was heard. Lady Letitia gave a little shriek and jumped up.

"I thought for the moment it was the sound of cannon," she said, with a faint smile. And her husband and Camiola knew only too well what she was thinking of. No telegram came that night; and the papers next morning brought no news. It was a relief that no news had come. No news was, truly, in that state of things, good news; and yet there was something terrible in the thought that the whole livelong day had to be gone through again in the shuddering expectation of something to come which might come at any moment, and which, when it did come, might prove to be the very worst.

"I think it was better in the days when there were no telegrams," Lady Letitia sadly said; "then one was not always expecting."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"PALLAS TE HOC VULNERE."

WALTER did not succeed in getting out of his flirtation with Lady Pallas quite as easily as he had hoped. He made an effort to draw out of it; and Lady Pallas saw it, and set it down to some remonstrance on Janette's part, and made up her mind to punish both Janette and him. Lady Pallas never in any case would let a man throw her over; she would always do the throwing over herself. It was the fate of every man who got entangled in a flirtation with her to be thrown over; this was the crowning triumph of Lady Pallas's game; she enjoyed it most of all. She would let no man off until he had written her a letter containing a wild declaration of love; and then if she wanted to get rid of him she made his letter an excuse for dropping him altogether, and she got additional credit among her friends and acquaintances for her propriety and prudence. To her more intimate friends she explained that it was unsatisfactory to let a man off without having a written declaration of love from him; that was the trophy; that was his scalp. Lady Pallas had a large collection of such scalps at her belt, and she was not going to let Walter Fitzurse off until she had added his to her adornment.

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So she drew him on; he was easily drawn on. Her social position added inestimable value to her charms in his eyes. He was proud and delighted to be seen with her; to be talked about with her. She drew him quite away from Janette, who passed lonely hours now, but as yet made no complaint; too much bewildered by the whole affair to understand whether she had any right to complain or not. At last there came to Lady Pallas the inevitable letter pouring out Walter's whole soul. It was very effusive and rhapsodical indeed; proclaimed a passion of the wildest kind, declared that he had never known love before, spoke of Janette in words of pitying kindness as a devoted and loving young woman who was utterly incapable of appreciating a nature like his, and assured Lady Pallas that in her and her alone he found a soul respondent to his own, and so forth, and so forth. Lady Pallas had seen a good deal of that sort of thing before, and was hardly even amused by it now. But it was all she wanted of Walter; and she went off in triumph and delight to call on Janette.

"So glad you are alone, Mrs. Fitzurse," Lady Pallas said. "I have something rather particular to say to you. I know you are a thoughtful and sensible young woman and won't mind. You must really keep that husband of yours in better order, my dear, and not let him go running all over the place making love to married ladies."

Janette rose up indignant, with an angry light in her eyes, and a colour coming even into her pale cheeks. Lady Pallas went on composedly—

"He has been making love to me this time—of course you saw, but you had too much sense to notice it, and I did not think it would be wise of me to seem to make too much of it—the best thing is to treat all that sort of stuff lightly as long as one can. I dare say you will come to think the same yourself before long; you will be persecuted with attentions, as people call them. But still there are bounds, you know; and your silly husband has been writing me such a letter! Why, if I told *my* husband about it there would be an awful row. But I didn't; what would be the use of making trouble? I thought the best thing I could do was to come to you and get you to scold your husband."

"Has my husband been making love to you, Lady Pallas?"

"My dear, you shall judge for yourself. Here is his letter, you can read it."

Lady Pallas handed her the letter. It was indeed in Walter's handwriting. Janette's eyes were dazed.

"I don't want to read it," she said coldly. "It was not meant for me to see."

"No, indeed; that it certainly was not; but you have a right to read it all the same. I make it my particular request that you should read it."

A faint glimmer of hope broke in upon Janette's betossed mind. "Perhaps it is not so bad as she says. Perhaps if I read it I shall

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think better of him." So she read it. Oh no, there was no mistake; there was no thinking better of him. It was a love-letter—a love-letter full of passion and rapture. There was no use in halting now; she read it all through; even the words which disparaged and made little of herself, and told Lady Pallas that he never had loved her. She felt herself growing old as she read the letter; she was turning from a credulous child into a hard and cynical woman of the world.

"What do you want me to do, Lady Pallas?"

"Just to keep this letter—you may have it—and show it to your naughty husband, and tell him he is never to make love to me any more on pain of having Lord Pallas told of it; and tell him never to come to see me again, for I shall not be at home to him any more. Good gracious! to think of writing *me* a letter like that! One would think I was a witch and had bewitched him! That letter will be a great weapon in your hands, Mrs. Fitzurse; you can make him do anything you like with that. I wish to goodness I had in my hands such a letter from my husband written to some woman; I would make him sit up, I can tell you. But Lord Pallas doesn't care a straw for any woman but me; I don't believe he was ever in love with any other woman in all his life."

"You are very happy," Janette said coldly.

"Happy? Well, I don't know; it is tiresome sometimes to have one's husband so very fond of one. Well, that's all I came to say, Mrs. Fitzurse. Don't take this too much to heart; men are all very much the same sort of thing. I have had letters like that from the husbands of several dear friends of mine."

"Have you shown the letters to all these dear friends?"

"That depends, you know; where a man can be easily frightened off I shouldn't think it necessary to appeal to his wife—or where he wasn't very bad, you know."

"Why have you favoured me?"

"Well, you seemed so trusting, and innocent, and unacquainted with the world and the ways of men, that I thought it only the act of friendship to open your eyes at once and show you how absurd it is for us women to trust to professions of love and all that, and to make ourselves unhappy about them, or care for them in the least——"

"I would rather have cared for my husband——"

"If one could, you know, if one could; but one can't after a while; one is sure to find out something, or else to be tired of one's husband; and it is better to find out something. It will do you good, I know, to be put on your guard early in your married life. You will get on ever so much the better by knowing the worst at once. I have given you a splendid weapon to use against your husband for the future. You ought to be able to keep him in good control for the rest of his natural life. Such a shame; and with so pretty and charming a young creature for his wife! Why, you dear little child, you are scarcely half my age, and such a sweet-

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looking little saint-like face! Compare me!—well, I don't know what men are like. The sooner we learn to despise them the better; to despise them and to govern them. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Fitzurse; how is Lady Letitia? I haven't seen her this long time; she seems to stick always now in that dreadful place across the water."

Janette kept her composure bravely while her visitor remained. At last Lady Pallas went away, feeling very happy. She had had her triumph over Janette, and had at the same time, she thought, behaved very generously and kindly to the little thing. Lady Pallas really thought it a good action to open the little wife's eyes at once, and of course it was a highly pleasurable good action to the doer, for it was a great gratification to Lady Pallas to be able to tell Janette that she had made Janette's husband wild with love for her. Lady Pallas always thought it good fun to make young women's husbands fall in love with her. So she was doubly happy this time. She had the triumph over Janette, and she had also the consciousness of having done a good action. "Poor little woman!" she thought complacently; "I dare say she will cry her eyes out over this."

Lady Pallas had to make one or two other calls before she went home. One was at the house of a great lady, a friend of hers, who happened to have just then some benevolent project for the reclamation and shelter of fallen women. She invited Lady Pallas to help her, but Lady Pallas would not do anything of the kind.

"They don't deserve to be helped, these creatures," she said energetically. "Whose fault is it but their own if they fall? Let them remain fallen: I don't think proper women ought to have anything to do with them or to countenance them in any way. It seems to me positively indecent to have anything to do with such wretches."

"Even to reclaim them?" her astonished friend asked.

"Oh, you can't reclaim such creatures—it wouldn't be any use reclaiming them. They are a disgrace to our sex, and the more they are cut off from us altogether the better. It is only encouraging vice—putting a premium upon vice—to have anything to do with them. I have no pity for women who go wrong, and I am sure if you think it over you will agree with me in the end."

Meanwhile, how did Janette feel now that it was all over—the love, the dream of happiness? What Janette felt was not the ordinary pang of jealousy that a wife feels and often contrives to get over. Many a man has done as bad a thing as Walter had done, whose wife can yet find it in her heart to forgive him, and to live on with him happily enough. Many a man has done far worse, and yet been forgiven and taken once more into confidence and affection by a faithful wife. But what this meant to Janette was the wreck of the whole structure of her life. The man she was married to had turned out to be a totally different being from the man she believed herself to be marrying. A woman who believes she is marrying a hero, and finds out that she has married a swindler; a

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woman who, believing herself to be the wife of an Alceste, discovers when too late that she is the wife of a Tartuffe, could not be more utterly deceived than was poor Janette Fitzurse. The man she loved was not in existence, and had never been in existence. She was bound by her marriage bond to a creature whom she despised. She had hardly a thought about Lady Pallas; she had not time to be angry with her. It was not a question of Lady Pallas; what did it matter about her? Janette only knew that Walter was a false, deceitful, worthless creature—that was the one terrible fact which darkened the sunlight of her life and blighted her youth without hope. He was gone, and there was an end. "I will go to my father and mother," she said. She would not remain another night under the same roof with her husband, although it was the roof of a house which, too, was her father's. She wrote a few lines, with which she enclosed Walter's own letter written to Lady Pallas; told him that she was going to her father and mother, and wished not to see him any more. She left it addressed to him on the desk where he used to write, whenever the spell of literary composition was on him. She stopped for a moment before laying the letter on the desk, and she thought of the fervour of admiration, pride, and hope with which she used to watch him as he wrote there, and the conviction she had that he would one day astonish the world by his genius and by its devotion to some great purpose for the improvement of the lot of men and women. Now all that was over. She would never watch him writing any more; never more have faith in him or hope for him. Little by little her faith had lately been shaken; but she did not dream of seeing it thus shattered at one stroke. She had to own to herself in a reluctant way that the revelation, after all, was not so much of a surprise to her. It was rather like the terrible confirmation of some surmise which one cannot help making, and yet would fain condemn one's self for allowing it a moment's residence in the breast. It was very hard, very hard; but there was no help for it. The other day she was a young and happy bride; now she was in the truest and most cruel sense a widow. What was an ordinary widowhood compared with hers? The woman whose husband is dead may lament him and love him and keep his memory in reverence to the end of her life. He may abide in her bosom as warmly as a living heart; he may be a perpetual light and guidance to her. But Janette was for ever and altogether widowed. For her there was no memory to cherish; she could set up no shrine in her heart at which to do loving worship.

She was thinking of all this in a vague sort of way, rather as if it were another's trouble and not hers. Lady Pallas was mistaken about Janette crying her eyes out; at least, the time for crying had not come yet. She put the letter with its fatal enclosure on her husband's desk, and then she prepared to go. For a moment she had a thought of going to Mrs. Pollen's to see Camiola. She did not yet know that Camiola had gone to Fitzurseham; but she

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put aside the idea. She was not fit to see any one but her mother just then, she said to herself. Oh, how kind and good her mother had always been, and how right she was when she distrusted *him*! Janette longed to make her the poor, sad reparation of acknowledging to her how right she had been. It was while Janette was in the carriage driving to Fitzurseham that a strange, quite new physical sensation startled her and at first made her think that she was going to die, and she felt relieved at the thought; and then in an instant the truth came borne in upon her, and she knew that that sensation spoke not of death but of life; and then she became hysterical indeed; and if Lady Pallas could have seen her she would have been immensely gratified, no doubt, for Janette seemed as if she were really bent on crying her eyes out. But Lady Pallas would not have known the cause, or at least all the cause, of those tears.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MRS. POLLEN CONSENTS TO MEDIATE.

THE day had been one of disappointment for Walter, so far. He had tried to get on with some literary work, but had found that he was not in the vein. He went to the club for luncheon, and heard one or two men there talking of Lady Pallas, and they spoke of her as carrying on a flirtation just now with somebody whom Walter did not even know by name; and they talked of this before him, and even to him, as if it were something in which he could not be supposed to have any keen interest. It was plain, then, that people did not talk of him and Lady Pallas together; and much of his labour of love-making was therefore thrown away. Moreover, the two men agreed that it was of no use any one starting a flirtation with Lady Pallas; she would only make a fool of him and throw him over.

This was annoying. He hurried back to his chambers expecting Janette; for, notwithstanding the letter to Lady Pallas, or perhaps because of it, he had for the last day or two been trying hard to get back to the old affectionate terms with his wife, and he had asked her particularly to call for him this day, and he understood that she promised. But she did not come. He waited until six o'clock and she did not come; she was clearly not coming. He felt that he had a rightful ground of complaint against her, and that he was well entitled to go and call on Lady Pallas. That lady was at home to her friends every afternoon in the season from six o'clock until seven. He called, and was told that Lady Pallas was not at home. He felt sure that she was at home; and that the *consigne* merely meant not at home to him. He lingered in the street for a while and saw several persons, men and women, knock at Lady Pallas's door and gain ready admittance. He was excluded, then—that was clear. Still, he was not altogether discon-

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certed by that. It might be a necessary sacrifice to propriety because of his letter. Lady Pallas might not like him to believe that she received such letters wholly without rebuke. He turned from the street and walked home, smoothing his brow as best he could, in order to meet Janette with looks of becoming affection.

He entered the room where he usually wrote. It was growing dusk already. He saw a letter lying on his desk; it was in Janette's handwriting. This, no doubt, would be the explanation why she had not come to the chambers for him. He took it to the window and opened it. A paper enclosed in the letter dropped out. He picked it up, and naturally looked first to see what it was. The sight almost failed his eyes when he saw that it was his own letter to Lady Pallas come back to him through the medium of his wife. Then he read Janette's short, decisive letter. Lady Pallas had betrayed him, had given his letter to his wife. Janette had left him; it was all over. Almost the first thought that came into his mind was that he could not stay any longer in that house. It was the house of Janette's father; she had left him, and he would be turned out. He would be cut adrift; no helping hand would be stretched to him any more; he might as well go back to Fitzurseham at once.

What was to be done? Should he endeavour to see Janette and try to talk her over, or make a full confession, abase himself in the dust before her, and beg for pity and pardon? Something told him that Janette would prove relentless; at least that, having found herself deceived in him as well as by him, she could never care for him again, and would not go through the farce of living with him as if she loved him. Besides, her family all hated him, had hated him from the first—they would do all they could to put her against him. Still, something must be done; he could not give in without making some effort to put things straight. He felt utterly humiliated; Lady Pallas had acted a shameful part with him, he thought; she had drawn him on only to make a mockery of him. Was anything like that ever heard of before in decent society—to betray a man's confidence to a man's own wife? Walter felt that the world was becoming hideously depraved; that English society was going down straight to the lowest deeps of demoralization. One little scrap of comfort he had: Janette had not kept the letter, as she might have done. It was in his possession once again, and he would take good care that it could never be evidence against him. It would still be open to him to insist that it did not bear all the meaning Lady Pallas and Janette had put upon it. He could argue that it was merely an unmeaning piece of high-flown poetic compliment such as men are constantly offering to women, especially literary aspirants to their gracious patronesses, and meaning no harm thereby. The fact that he had destroyed the letter might create suspicion; but it was much easier to deal with suspicion than with certainty. If Janette had kept the letter, and merely told him that she had it in her keeping to

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produce against him, then indeed his case would be bad; but as matters were, there was a good deal to be glad of; the condition of things was not absolutely hopeless.

It suddenly occurred to him that it would be well to see Mrs. Pollen at once, and endeavour to enlist her intervention on his behalf, and perhaps that of Camiola. Mrs. Pollen was a sort of woman with whom a good deal could be done by any one who threw himself frankly on her protection, and concealed nothing. An instinct told him that he had better not destroy his unlucky letter until he had seen Mrs. Pollen. If she had reason to believe that he had destroyed it purposely, in order to get rid of the worst evidence against him, it would be of no use his trying to bring her to his side. Besides, he did not suppose she was the sort of woman to make too much fuss about a married man's attempt at flirtation with a professional flirt, as he now believed Lady Pallas to be. No, he would be entirely candid with Mrs. Pollen; she should know everything. There would be still time to see her before dinner.

He hurried round to Mrs. Pollen's hotel. She had just come in, he was told. He begged to see her for a few minutes; she sent out to say that she would see him. She was alone in a room faintly lighted, the windows closed against autumnal dusk; a fire was burning.

"Well," she said sharply, "I am glad to see you—I am glad to see any one to-day." This was not a flattering way of putting things, but Walter somehow did not ever expect now to find Mrs. Pollen very gracious to him. "I have been lonely, and thinking—two things which don't agree with me. I am in a humour to welcome any companionship. Miss Sabine has gone back to Lady Letitia's—but of course you know that?"

"No, I haven't heard. What has she gone for?"

"Well, that stupid boy, that love-lorn brother-in-law of yours, has been ordered on some expedition, or something, and of course Lady Letitia has made up her mind that he must be killed, that the whole forces of the Mahdi have set their hearts on removing so dangerous an enemy from their path; and Camiola goes to Fitzurse-ham to help Lady Letitia in defending Georgie, who is only a few thousand miles off. So I must be left alone." She shrugged her shoulders and settled herself in her chair with an air of determined resignation. Walter did not appear actually convulsed by the news of Georgie's danger.

"You don't seem to take it to heart much?" Mrs. Pollen said, looking sharply at him.

"I have trouble of my own," he answered gloomily. "I have come to you for advice and help."

"Indeed? I thought you must have come for something."

"You have made us all accustomed to come to you when we are in any trouble."

"How very nice. Well, what's up? Where is Janette? Is she in the trouble as well as you?"

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"She is in trouble; but not as bad as mine. She has done no wrong; she has nothing to reproach herself with."

"And you have? Well, that is easy to understand. Indeed, I have been hearing bad news of you. I will speak to you about it afterwards; now I want to hear your story."

"I have just been home," he said in deep tragic tones, "and I find Janette gone."

"Gone out, I suppose you mean. Well?"

"I don't mean gone out; Janette has left me."

Mrs. Pollen now wheeled her chair suddenly round and looked at him in amazement. "Janette has left you—left you for ever?"

"She says so. Here is her letter; she has left this for me. Do please read it, Mrs. Pollen."

"Draw over that little table with the lamp nearer to me. Thanks, that will do." She took the letter and read it over; then began and read it through a second time.

"What is the letter Janette speaks of? Have you got it? Am I to see that too?"

"You are."—"How lucky," he thought, "that I did not destroy it at once!"—"Take it, Mrs. Pollen; it is an insane letter of mine to Lady Pallas. Lady Pallas must have handed it to my wife."

Mrs. Pollen took the letter and read it; not so carefully, however, as she had read that of Janette. "I see," she said; "regular sort of thing. What a fool you are! I must say I think it was rather unfair of Lady Pallas to give such a letter to a man's wife. You deserve anything; but it was cruel to Janette. I saw this some time back, that Lady Pallas was fooling you to the top of your bent; and you know I have given you a broad hint or two on that matter, which of course you didn't take——"

"I know you are always kind."

"It wasn't on your account," she replied sharply; "nor on *her* account, but on Janette's; I didn't want to have Janette made ridiculous and an object of sympathy in the minds of stupid gossiping people. Everybody tells me that Lady Pallas only gets up flirtations for the sake of making fools of men, and throwing them over, and that she wouldn't risk her place in society for one second for all the men that ever made fools of themselves, or that nature had made fools of already. Fancy a silly green young donkey from Fitzurseham, like you—in your first season of London society—getting into a flirtation with Lady Pallas and writing a love-letter to her! If I were Janette I would only laugh in your face, and keep the letter to be a standing source of derision. My suburban Lovelace, to be sure; my Don Juan of the slums!"

"I am very poor," he said, crimsoning with anger; "my family has been brought low——"

"Your family—stuff! Brought low? When were they high? Your family was my late husband's family; I have found out that. It is the only reason why I took any interest in you—I mean apart

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from my liking for your wife, to whom you have behaved so prettily. If you really did come out of the house of the Fitzurses I should never have cared one straw what became of you. Your father was a cousin of my husband, and of course it was no fault of yours if he brought you up in the absurd idea that you were a member of a great house. Well, you have shown some title to be accounted one of its members, for I am sure you have been worthless enough for the best of them; and if you have not been quite as much of a Don Juan, that was by no merit of your own; you would have been if you could. Your wife, then, has found you out and gone back to her father and mother? From her point of view she was quite right, although I shouldn't have thought you worth making such a work about."

"She does not feel so to me," he said, abjectly deprecating Mrs. Pollen's scorn. "She thinks I am at least worthy of her anger."

"Yes; I said so. *I* shouldn't. If I were she I would just go on as if nothing had happened; I wouldn't trouble my people about such a trumpery matter, or give anybody a chance of talking about me. But *she* couldn't take that free-and-easy, woman-of-the-world view of things, and of course she is wounded to the heart. Good heavens, it almost makes one wild to think of a woman like her being wounded to the heart by anything that a creature like you could do! Why must women have hearts?"

"You have a heart," he pleaded, "but you have closed it against me. I am down, and you only trample on me."

"I find you trampling on her," Mrs. Pollen said vehemently, "and I can't help trampling on you. Very well; I'll not trample any more. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go to Janette; to go to Lady Letitia; to speak for me; to say anything you like; to make the most complete acknowledgment of my folly, and to promise for the future. If you could only see Janette before she had told anything to Lady Letitia——"

"Oh, I should think that would be out of the question. Very well; I don't know whether I am doing right, but I will go and try to persuade Janette to forgive you this time. I don't know that she will; I fancy her very truthfulness, her very purity, will make her as hard as marble—the purest marble is the hardest, don't they say? She will not see how you and she could ever be the same to each other again. But you have thrown yourself on me, and I will do my best."

"Can I ever show my gratitude?" He took her hand and tried to put it to his lips.

"Drop that sort of thing; it is thrown away on me. I shouldn't like to have my hand touched by your lips even though I had gloves on. I don't want any gratitude; I am doing all that I can do for Janette, and not for you. Now about this letter; it had better be destroyed, I think. No good can come of keeping it."

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This was of course his own idea, but he was glad that the suggestion came from her. He put the letter into the fire and watched it burning away into black tinder and then crumbling into ashes.

"Like that," Mrs. Pollen said, "your hopes and your life will blacken and crumble and turn into ashes if you are not truly sorry for what you have done, and determined to make atonement."

She stood up before him on the hearth, pointing to the little heap of ashes, black and feathery as the torn plumage of a raven, which now alone remained of his unlucky letter. There was something of her Eastern origin in the attitude and the manner, and the prophecy too, perhaps.

"Let it be so," Fitzurse said, becoming dramatic or melodramatic also. "Such a fate would be well deserved."

He was about to go.

"One word," she said. "I have had Mrs. Lammas here to-day —Vinnie's mother."

"Yes?" He looked embarrassed.

"She tells me that you have been seeing her daughter lately. Is that true? She complains of it."

"We met by the merest accident, and only exchanged half a dozen words. I didn't seek her. I don't mean to."

"No? I am glad. Let her alone, mind. I'll stand no nonsense about that, remember. I know a good deal about you that we have not talked of, and I told you before that the amnesty was only conditional. My Albanian, Joseph, is a man of wonderful memory."

"Just one thing," he said beseechingly. He had all through the interview acted on what he conceived to be his best policy with her—that of utter submission. "I want to ask you one favour. I want to ask you not to tell Romont about this—about this quarrel with Janette, I mean. Don't tell him *that*. I don't want him to think too hardly of me."

"He knows a good deal about you already," Mrs. Pollen said in a slow and significant way. "He knows more than he told me, I fancy. But I have ways of finding out things."

"I know that Joseph told you everything," Fitzurse said despondently; "I am in your power altogether. I trust myself fearlessly to you; you will not be sorry for giving me this last chance. But I shouldn't like Romont to know about the quarrel with Janette and the cause; don't tell him that."

"No; I'll not tell him. I like you none the worse for asking me. I am glad that you are ashamed of what you have done, and that you would wish him not to think too badly of you. Well, he shall never know anything about it so far as I am concerned. Now we haven't any more to say, have we?"

"When shall I see you again? When shall I know what has been your success?"

"I shall go at once. You had better come with me; you can

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hang around somewhere; we'll arrange that. If I am successful you can be sent for. If not——"

"If not I think the bottom of the Thames would be about my best place."

"There's something to be said for that view of matters," was Mrs. Pollen's composed reply. "But you'll never do *that*; you'll find something to live for where many a better and wiser man might show himself less of a practical philosopher. Well, let us have the carriage and go."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JANETTE AT HOME AGAIN.

A MELANCHOLY day was drawing to a close with Lady Letitia and Camiola. They had been watching every moment for some news of Georgie. Nowhere could be found two more kindly-hearted and unselfish women; but it is much to be feared that they were concerned almost altogether about the fate of Georgie Lisle, and had little thought to spare for the hundreds of other Georgies who were in like danger. They were watching with eyes and ears as keenly set as though they could hear the firing of the English guns far away along the Nile. Truly there is something in what Lady Letitia had said about the additional anxiety and agony that the telegram brings us. In other days the anxious mother would have known that only a mail could bring a letter; and that many days must pass over her head without any possibility of her hearing tale or tidings about her son. For these days, at all events, she would go about the business of her life as usual; there would be nothing to watch for and wait for. But now any moment might bring its fateful message to Lady Letitia; it was as if she were on the edge of the fight itself. The War Office was always very kind in letting her know anything worth knowing that concerned her son. Even if she did not have a message herself, the War Office might learn something and send the news on to her. Meanwhile any casual telegram from any friend in London, a message sent by wire from Mr. Lisle to say that he could not get back to dinner at the ordinary hour, would thrill her at its sight as if it were the story of her boy's death. The evening was grey and melancholy. The year had been one of those in which summer prolongs itself out of its season, and then suddenly vanishes and leaves England in the chill of advanced autumn, as a tropical day changes into night without intervening twilight. The two women were standing on the lawn; they had been walking up and down with their arms round each other's waists. Camiola's presence was the best comfort Lady Letitia could have; it brought assurance for the future, if there was to be any future worth thinking of.

"It gets chilly; shall we go in?" Lady Letitia said.

"Look here, Lady Letitia, I have been thinking of something.

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This waiting here becomes unbearable, and you know we shall have to wait a long time somewhere. This dreadful campaign won't end for ever so long, perhaps. Why should we wait here? Why not go out to Egypt—to Cairo, and wait there? We should be near the spot then; and I don't think the waiting would be half so bad."

In this thought Camiola had more meaning than she would have put into words. "If Georgie lives"—this was her idea—"I must marry him; and I had better go out of this at once. I can bear it better when I have left this place altogether and broken with the associations." Lady Letitia's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the thought of being so much nearer to her boy. But her rapture chilled off very soon.

"I don't think Mr. Lisle could go," she said.

"No, but we don't want him. You and I can go. Nothing will happen to us, and it will be such a relief to our minds. Let Janette come over and look after Mr. Lisle."

"I don't think Mr. Lisle would quite like my going. He would think I have duties here at home which I can do, and he would perhaps not see what good I could do out in Egypt, where of course I couldn't be very near Georgie. Besides, I don't really think we could afford the money this year."

"But I have money, and I never spend any of it; you never let me; you are such a screw about my money. Molière's Harpagon wasn't half as miserly about his own money as you are about mine. And I have never travelled; everybody has seen the East except me. Now you must let me have my way for once. I'll do this."

"There may not be any occasion," Lady Letitia said, with foreboding tears coming into her eyes.

"There will be occasion," Camiola said, as decisively as if she were one of the destinies. "Georgie will come splendidly out of this and will be a hero, and we'll go out to Cairo. Leave me to persuade Mr. Lisle; I know I can do that. Why, here comes Janette, just in time to help us in our plot. Janette, Janette, come here."

A little figure dressed in black was coming across the lawn. It was Janette; she came to her mother and fell into her arms. Her pale face bore the cruel marks of tears. Lady Letitia thought they were shed because of Georgie's danger.

"I am so glad you came, my darling—to comfort me. It is terrible, isn't it? At any moment we may hear the news."

"News of what, mamma?" Janette lifted her distraught face.

"My child! News of Georgie. He is in action; he may be killed at any moment; we may hear of his death."

"Dear Lady Letitia, don't frighten poor Janette in that way," Camiola interposed. "Why must Georgie be killed? Why shouldn't he come out of a battle as well as so many others? Janette, I am so glad you have come to help me in keeping Lady Letitia

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alive; she will have it that Georgie must be killed; she is already lamenting him as if all were over."

This was said in a soothing, petting sort of way, as if Camiola were comforting a child. She felt very strong when compared to either of these short and slender women; she felt bound to take care of them both.

"I didn't come about that," Janette confessed; "I didn't know that Georgie was in such danger. I came for another reason; I have something to tell you." She opened her solemn eyes and gazed at Lady Letitia.

In a moment Camiola knew that it was something about Walter Fitzurse. "I am going into the house," she said.

"You shall know all, Camiola, my sister," Janette said. "There's nothing to be kept from you; but I must tell mamma first. She will tell you; I could only tell it to mamma." Then when Camiola had gone—gone with sad foreboding heart—Janette said—

"Mamma, you were right always and I was wrong. I have left Walter; I don't want ever to see him again."

In the shock of this announcement even Georgie's danger was forgotten by Lady Letitia. Janette told her story simply and in a few words. Walter had made love to a married woman; had written her a love-letter, in which he told her that he had never loved any one but her; that he had never loved Janette at all. She had read the letter; it was given to her to read by the woman to whom it was sent. She would never live with Walter again. It was curious to observe how Janette had grown with her trouble She was not any longer a girl asking the advice of her mother. She was a determined woman telling her mother of her unalterable determination. Lady Letitia listened in horror to this revelation. Never before had she been brought into close personal contact with such a fact in life. She had known many cases of worthless husbands among the poor of Fitzurseham; and of course she knew very well that such things happened among the rich and the great as well. But they had never been brought home to her. All her personal experience of husbands and wives was just like that of her own household. Her father had been a most loving and true husband; so had Mr. Lisle's father, although he didn't come of any great family; so were her brothers. Much as she had disliked Janette's marriage, she had never expected that such a thing as that would happen. The child was not long out of her honeymoon. She remained silent while Janette went on to tell her in broken sentences that she had begun lately to have the truth forced upon her that Walter was not the kind of man she had fondly believed him to be; that his professions of high and noble purpose were all sham; that when she found out about his love-affair she was not after all so much surprised as she might have been.

"My sweet child, this is too dreadful. I can't even think over it; I can't take it all in just yet. But after all, my darling Janette —to leave your husband, you know—that is indeed a solemn step.

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I don't know; I never heard of such a thing. To leave one's husband; my dear, we must think before we make up our minds to that. We must consult your father."

"Mamma, my mind is all made up. I couldn't live with him any more; how could I look up to him and respect him? He would be always like that; it would happen again and again."

"Let us go and speak to your father, dear. He has come in."

They went into the house and found the Rector in his study.

"St. George, my love, here is Janette; our child has sad news to tell us."

The best and purest of men, at all events if he be in any way a man of the world, does not take a story of this kind exactly as a woman like Lady Letitia would take it. Mr. Lisle was filled with anger against Walter, and sympathy with his daughter; but he could not for the moment help wishing that the lady, whoever she was, to whom the love-letter was addressed, had shown it to some one else, and not to Walter Fitzurse's wife.

"The woman could hardly have had any good purpose in showing the letter to you, Janette."

"That isn't the point, St. George dear," Lady Letitia said in mild remonstrance.

"I have thought of that," Janette said. "I don't know what her purpose was; but it doesn't matter to me. She is quite a proper woman; that is quite clear."

"But I gather from you that she encouraged him," the Rector said. He was only trying to think what ought to be done.

"Yes, she encouraged him at first," Janette said. "I suppose she thought it meant nothing then."

There was a pause.

"Janette says she will never live with him again, St. George."

"Oh, well, that is a very serious thing; a wife, you know! I must go and see him at once. We must at least hear what he has to say."

"It's of no use, dear, so far as I am concerned; I will never live with him again. You will not turn me out of this house, I suppose?"

"My dear child!" both the parents exclaimed, shocked at the bare idea of such a thing.

"Yes, you must go to him at once, St. George; and you must try not to lose your self-control."

"I must try; it will be hard work. I should like——" and Mr. Lisle clenched his fists in a manner which pretty clearly suggested what it was he would like to do.

The anxious conversation was interrupted by a servant who brought a card. It had some writing on it. It was from Mrs. Pollen, and bore the words, "Will you kindly see me? I want to speak to you so much. I have a strong reason; I wouldn't come at such a time if I hadn't."

"Can there be more trouble for us?" Lady Letitia asked herself in dismay.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAMIOLA'S PROJECT.

THAT was a trying interval for Mr. Lisle when he was left alone with Janette after Lady Letitia had gone, not very willingly, to speak to Mrs. Pollen. He was a man of deep feeling and warm emotion, but he was shy and reserved in manner, shy even with his daughter. He was very dependent for his manner on the manner of others to him. He would have liked to take Janette in his arms and kiss her a thousand times, and pour out words of fondness over her; but he could not do it, somehow. She seemed constrained and cold, merely because she felt herself to some extent on her defence; she knew she would have to resist a strong effort to get her to go back to her husband. Therefore, much as she loved her father, she held aloof from him, occupying her defensive position, resolute to maintain it. She could not even see that there were two sides to the question; she could not understand how it would be possible for her to go back to Walter after what had happened. Any demonstration of affection just now towards her father would have been taken, she assumed, as a sign of yielding, and she could not yield.

"I don't deny that his conduct has been very bad," the Rector said. It was characteristic of the simple magnanimity of his nature that he had not once reminded Janette of his early and constant distrust of her husband. "But still, my dear child, he is your husband. I am one of those who have always doubted the authority of the civil law to dissolve any marriage; and in your case there is no ground even for the intervention of the civil law. It would be a harsh measure to condemn a man utterly and for ever because of one fault, however grave and culpable. It may be your happiness—as I think it would be your duty to make the effort at least—it may be your happiness to bring him to a better life and a higher principle. Then, you know, there is the giving of scandal, and people in a rather conspicuous position should especially avoid anything of the kind, in days like ours too; in days like ours, when so much that was once held sacred is questioned and put to trial; and I do think, Janette, as a clergyman and as—as your very loving father, dear—that you are called upon to make some sacrifice of your feelings here. I do indeed."

The Rector's voice was giving way, and his spectacle-glasses, more moony than ever, were becoming dimmed with moisture. Janette felt unutterable affection for him, but she could not understand why he should want her to give way.

"But, my darling dear, you don't understand me; you don't enter into my feelings. He isn't the man I believed I was marrying; my soul and his could not be together; there is no truth in him, no honour, no principle; he cares for nothing, nothing, nothing but

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vanity and himself. Oh, who could condemn a poor girl with some yearning for a higher life to the perpetual companionship of such a man? I should hate myself and despise myself if I could go back to him and settle down and pretend to love him and go on as if I thought he could love me! Listen, papa," and the child, opening her eyes their widest, prepared to make what she believed must be a crushing and final statement, "you can't believe one word he says on anything, on anything; oh, I know it, I know it, too well."

Mr. Lisle was relieved when his wife came back into the room. She looked at Janette while speaking to him.

"St. George, it is Mrs. Pollen. She has come from *him*. I had to speak to her; and she is a good woman. She has come from him—he has sent her to beg Janette's pardon and to explain all, and to promise better things for the future. What do you think?"

"You will see her, Janette?" Mr. Lisle said.

"Is this a sort of matter one discusses with strangers? Why, I haven't even spoken of it to Camiola yet."

"Mrs. Pollen isn't quite a stranger in this, Janette," Lady Letitia said quickly. "She is a relative of his, the only living relative he has. I mean, he is a relation of her late husband; and she is anxious about him, naturally. I thought it a little odd at first, her coming at such a time; intrusive rather it seemed; but it was really nothing of the kind. He begged her to come, and she has come on his behalf. You had better see her, Janette. She has a kind heart—one must like her."

"She is a very sensible woman too," the Rector added, heartily welcoming her intervention. "You had better see her."

"Oh yes; I'll see her if you like—if you think I ought to. But it won't do any good; she can't make things any different from what they are. I'll see her; yes."

"Will you see her here, Janette?"

"No, mamma dear; I'll go to her."

Janette left the room.

"This is a bad business, Letitia," the Rector said. "I don't believe we shall be able to persuade her; the child's heart seems to be steeled against him. I don't know what one ought to do; he is a thorough cad, that is quite clear. It seems hard to have to sacrifice one's daughter to such a creature."

"She is already sacrificed to him, St. George; she has sacrificed herself. The thing is done. The question is whether she had not best persevere now, and at least do her duty to her husband since she has made him her husband, whatever he may be."

"She detests him. Fancy a home in which the wife detests the husband! It is shocking to think of!"

There was silence for a moment. Then Lady Letitia said in a very low tone—a sort of whisper—as if there was a chance of some stranger hearing what she was saying—

"Have you noticed anything in her look? Have you guessed anything, St. George?"

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The Rector looked at her surprised. After a moment of perplexity, a ray of light seemed to come to him. "Oh, do you think so?" he asked.

"My dear, I am sure of it."

"Well, well—that does make a difference. Do you know that I believe by civil law he could after a short time take her child from her?"

"Yes, dear; I was thinking of that when I urged her to go back to him."

"Letitia, you are more thoughtful than I was; I was not thinking of that. But it alters everything. We must try to get her to go back."

It was to the credit of this good man that, here brought face to face with a calamity which to him was utterly unexpected, an undreamt-of incident in life for such a life as his, he wasted no word in mere repining or expression of bewilderment. It never could have occurred either to him or to his wife as one of the possibilities of life that the dearly loved daughter, whom they had brought up with such fond care, could marry in their despite a man whom they distrusted and disliked; and having married him should have to fly from him and his viciousness, and crave from them shelter and protection against the husband she had chosen for herself. How could they have thought of anything like this? Death, the death of a loved child, every father and mother thinks of as a dread chance; sickness, disappointments of various kinds are within the horizon of every one's expectation; but the fate that had befallen Janette was one which had never been foreshadowed, even in pessimist conjecture, to the thoughts of her father and mother. Yet confronted suddenly by the cruel fact they were not shaken from the moorings of the principles which had guided them through life. They were equal to the trial; they wasted no time in idle complainings or futile expressions of wonder why things were so. Lady Letitia felt herself strengthened and made patient by the presence of her husband.

They talked for what seemed a long time over what ought to to be done, or could be done. Presently Mrs. Pollen came in alone.

"I give it up," she said quietly.

"She will not see him?" Lady Letitia asked.

"We didn't even get to that. She will not hear of going back to him. Perhaps the child is right; I have almost come to think it. After all, what can there be worse than the cruel, degrading process that crushes all the nobleness out of one life by subjecting it to the debasing influence of another life which has no good in it? I can't believe that any law, human or divine, condemns a girl like Janette to live always with a man like that. The whole thing is a sad story, and of course one thinks at first it would be well to try to make the best of it and avoid scandal; but I really believe she is right. She couldn't do anything to make his nature any better. I know something of the way in which a woman's life, and

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nature, and soul may be dragged down by the constant association with ignoble ambitions and vulgar shams. I think she sees her way, and it is hardly the thing for me, anyhow, to try to turn her from it."

"Where is he?" the Rector asked.

"He? Oh, he's waiting outside somewhere on the chance of her seeing him. He came with me. I thought there might be still a chance of making up matters."

"How if we were to let him see her, Letitia?" Mr. Lisle asked of his wife, not hopefully, but in the tone of one who feels bound to leave no stone unturned.

"I think it would be only right," Lady Letitia answered promptly. "Seeing him and hearing him plead his own cause might perhaps touch her. It must touch her if she has any love left for him."

"Of course," Mrs. Pollen said. "But there's the difficulty—I don't believe she has any love left for him. It seems to have gone out like a candle in a strong wind."

"One can light the candle again," the Rector said.

"Yes, but I don't believe you can make her love for him light up again. She is an odd girl, not a bit like any other woman I ever knew. Most of us, when we do love a man, we love him in spite of anything he may do—we are angry with ourselves and ashamed of ourselves, perhaps, but there the love is and we can't help it. But I do believe this girl is incapable of loving any one who shows himself unworthy. I believe her heart and her moral nature go together, like light and heat. I am sure she is quite right, and that she is millions of miles above ordinary women, and above *me*. That's why I can't hope to change her resolution, and I don't believe I ought to try. But as to her seeing him, that's a different thing. If he can soften her, why, all right. Let's give him the chance, anyhow."

"Where is Janette?" the Rector asked.

"She is with Camiola, in her own room; the room that used to be hers," Lady Letitia replied, speaking the last words tearfully.

"Give Camiola the straight tip," Mrs. Pollen said, "and I'll go and find him; and when Janette is alone we'll send him in to talk to her. If that fails there's an end of the matter, and I for one shan't be very sorry."

"That's the thing to do," said Mr. Lisle.

Mrs. Pollen went in quest of Walter, and Lady Letitia arranged to have the word passed to Camiola in order that Camiola might leave the coast clear at the right time, and give the husband a chance of making his peace with his wife. Much as the Lisles disliked and distrusted Walter, they yet ardently desired that he should succeed in winning the forgiveness and reconquering the affection of their daughter. To them the bond that holds together husband and wife was absolutely sacred. No man and woman could have held in stronger aversion conduct like that of which Walter

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Fitzurse had been guilty towards their daughter, whom they loved so fondly; but still, as they would both have put it, still he was her husband, still he might be reclaimed for better things, still it was her duty to forgive him, and try to win him to goodness. So they saw their way at this bewildering moment even through eyes which were dashed with tears.

Mrs. Pollen presently returned alone.

"I can't find him anywhere," she said. "He is not anywhere in the grounds. He told the coachman he would be back in a few minutes, but there is no sign of him. Isn't it like him? Is there any other man in the world who would go mooning about at such a moment? Well, I firmly believe it is his last chance."

"Perhaps he has gone to Fitzurse House," the Rector suggested. "He didn't know, perhaps, that he was likely to be called in."

"Yes, we talked of that. He hasn't gone to Fitzurse House—at least, he hadn't up to a few minutes ago. I met Mr. Pilgrim, and I have sent him on a hunt for our lost sheep—black sheep, I am afraid. Pilgrim may find him."

"Pilgrim doesn't know, I hope——" the Rector began hastily.

"Pilgrim doesn't know anything about this. Pilgrim never wants to know anything; he never asks questions, and he never tries to guess. He will range over the whole place until he finds him—if he is still in this region at all. Of course, he may have chucked up the sponge and gone back to town."

Lady Letitia had not the faintest notion of Mrs. Pollen's meaning when she talked of Walter's having chucked up the sponge. But she was not in a mood to ask any questions.

"Well, we can only wait," she said.

Camiola came in, looking inquiringly for Walter, and surprised not to see him. She had been put in possession of the project to give him a last chance. Before that Janette had told her all, and she had pleaded hard with Janette for forgiveness and reconciliation, and in vain. There was an awkward silence for a few moments, and Camiola could hear the beating of her own anxious heart. Then the Rector started some talk, and it gradually came to a disclosure of Camiola's project for a journey to Egypt. Mr. Lisle was inclined at first to shake his head, but he was drawn on to think that the idea had a good deal to recommend it. If Janette would not live with her husband any more, it would be a very good thing to take her away out of England for the present. The excitement of being somewhere within hail of her brother and the anxiety about him, the joy if he came back to Cairo all right, the emotion of watching each day's news, would lift her out of her own personal cares and sorrows anyhow, and so far would be well for her. He would miss Lady Letitia—they had never before been separated for any time since their marriage; but that was a matter not to be thought of. Besides, it would probably be better to have all the women out of the way when it came to a final settlement with Janette's unfortunate husband. The trip would be a little

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expensive, but, under the circumstances, he did not care about that. After thinking the matter a little over, Mr. Lisle became positively enthusiastic about the project, and only wished it were possible for him to make one of the party. As was but natural with a man, Mr. Lisle, in all his anxiety about Georgie and his wish to be near him, felt also a yearning to gratify a desire long possessing him and still ungratified, the desire to see the Pyramids. Lady Letitia thought of nothing but getting nearer to her son.

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. POLLEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROJECT.

Mrs. Pollen kept for some time an unwonted and an ominous silence. This might have seemed singular to the others if it were not that two of them at least, Mr. Lisle and his wife, were too much absorbed in their own cares and desires to be very observant of the demeanour of anybody else. Camiola soon began to wonder why Mrs. Pollen took no part in the conversation. She was the only one in the company who knew anything about the East or about travelling. She had passed a great part of her life in travel, and yet she did not appear to have any suggestion to make just now. The truth of the matter was, that Mrs. Pollen had listened to all that was said with much interest, and entirely approved of the project as she understood it. But it soon appeared that she did not rightly understand it at all. Her idea at first was that only Lady Letitia and Janette were to go out, and that Camiola was to remain with her. But when she found that the scheme included the going out of Camiola to be near Georgie Lisle, her eyebrows arched themselves with curious movement.

"Oh, and you are to go too, Camiola dear?"

"Yes, Mrs. Pollen, I am to go. The project is mine altogether; I am to personally conduct this party."

"How very nice! How very delightful! Such a charming project! Then you will be so near Georgie! If ever he should be sent up to Cairo with despatches from the front you would see him?"

"Yes," Lady Letitia said, in a low, soft voice; "that is one of our motives."

Camiola felt herself blushing, and said nothing. She knew that something was coming.

"Yes," Mrs. Pollen said, repeating Lady Letitia's words slowly; "that is one of our motives. Exactly, to be sure. One of our motives, and a very natural motive; one quite understands. I like the whole idea immensely. I only wish I were going too. You see, I might be of some service; I know Egypt so well. I am much more familiar with Cairo than I am with Fitzurseham. Then I am a sort of Asiatic, Lady Letitia. Of course, I don't mean to say that I think Egypt is in Asia, although I believe a good many highly

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respectable women, brought up on the use of the globes and Mangnall's questions, have some idea of the kind."

"I suppose all Eastern places are much the same," Lady Letitia observed, apparently for the sake of saying something.

At this point in the conversation Mr. Lisle was sent for—somebody wanted to see him, and he saw everybody who asked for him. He left the room. Now Camiola knew Mrs. Pollen and her ways well enough to know that when she talked on as she had been doing she was only talking to gain time while she was thinking something out. Camiola could easily anticipate the objection Mrs. Pollen would feel to her proposal to go out to Egypt while Georgie Lisle was there; and she felt certain that even at this moment Mrs. Pollen was setting herself to devise some scheme by which the plan might be frustrated. She sat in anxiety, knowing that something was coming, unable even to guess what it might be.

"None of you know Egypt at all?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"Oh no; no. We don't any of us know a bit about it. I never travelled further than Naples," Lady Letitia said. "And I have been the greatest traveller of the three."

"It's so uncomfortable for women travelling alone," Mrs. Pollen said, meditatively. "And when you get off the regular tracks, positively dangerous now, I should think. I don't know what you would do when it came to the question of landing at Alexandria and getting all your things seen to, and giving *baksheesh* and all that. I fancy things are much worse now than they used to be, and they used to be bad enough. I don't see it, really."

"Come, now," Camiola thought to herself, "if this is all we shan't have much difficulty. If Mrs. Pollen only thinks of frightening us out of our enterprise, she won't make much of that." Camiola was inclined to indulge in a quiet smile at the idea of such a way of defeating her scheme.

"We shan't mind in the least," she said. "I have a genius for getting through all manner of little difficulties. Nothing could happen to us. I never was shy, or nervous, or afraid of anything in my life. We can get a dragoman to come out to the steamer to meet us. I have read all about that sort of thing. Fancy a traveller like you, Mrs. Pollen, who has gone half over the world alone, thinking of such difficulties."

"My dear, I wasn't thinking of discouraging you at all."

"Thank you, I am so glad," Camiola said, feeling greatly relieved.

Her feeling of relief was premature.

"I was only thinking how to have all that arranged for you," Mrs. Pollen said, fixing her dark eyes on Camiola with a look of audacious determination. "I will send a man with you who can take care of you and do everything for you. You know him, Camiola—my Albanian, my Joseph, my factotum?"

Camiola could hardly keep back a sudden exclamation. What could Mrs. Pollen mean? Was there really at hand an Albanian Joseph, a genuine Albanian; or what did this strange announce-

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ment imply or intend? Mrs. Pollen went on with the most cheery self-satisfaction, sending a look of saucy challenge and defiance every now and then at the bewildered Camiola.

"Yes; I am so glad; we have him here now. Joseph is just the man you want. He can take charge of everything, and do everything. He doesn't speak English, but that don't matter; you will be out of England soon enough, and he speaks lots of other languages."

"Does he know Egypt?" Lady Letitia asked.

"Egypt? Yes, I should think he did. He knows the East like a book. He knows a lot of things, doesn't he, Camiola?"

"Oh, it wouldn't do at all," Camiola said hastily.

"Why not, dear?" Mrs. Pollen asked slowly and deliberately, with all the simple earnestness of one who pauses for a reply.

"Oh, I don't know," Camiola replied, full of impatience, anger, and confusion. Of course she could not speak out and tell Lady Letitia what she knew of Mrs. Pollen's Albanian Joseph. Mrs. Pollen had her at the most complete disadvantage, and to Camiola's amazement seemed very much to enjoy it.

"I think it would be delightful," Lady Letitia said. "Of course, if you could spare him to us, Mrs. Pollen."

"I would spare him with pleasure," Mrs. Pollen answered, "to you, and to Camiola. I am sure I can answer for him that he would be delighted to go."

Camiola could not stand this any longer. She got up, and looking about the tables for a moment or two as if she were in quest of something she had just remembered, she went out of the room and left them.

"Camiola doesn't seem to like the idea," Mrs. Pollen said, with a manner of entire simplicity.

"I suppose she thinks we are giving you too much trouble, and so we are; but as you are so very kind, and really we are rather helpless travellers, I do think it would be a great advantage to have with us a courier of whom one knows something; I do think it is so kind of you. Fancy having a man with us who is actually your own regular servant—of course he would take more interest in us and look after us better than any courier hired in London or Paris could possibly be expected to do."

"I can answer for it that he will take the warmest interest in you," Mrs. Pollen declared.

"Mr. Lisle, I am sure, will be delighted to hear of this arrangement. I think he was a little uneasy at the idea of our starting off, poor unprotected females, for Egypt; and this will take a load off his mind."

Camiola made desperate efforts to get to private speech with Mrs. Pollen. She wanted to remonstrate, to ask for an explanation, to get to know what Mrs. Pollen meant. The moment was hardly one for farce or practical joke. Mrs. Pollen's action was inexplicable. But Mrs. Pollen was not to be intercepted easily or drawn into a

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corner and pressed into explanation. Once only Camiola got a chance of saying, in a tone of appeal that might well have pleaded for pity, the three words, "How can you?"

"I can," was Mrs. Pollen's quiet answer, "and I will. If you go to Cairo, Joseph goes too."

Lady Letitia prevented any further conference. She had suddenly recollected something—

"How stupid of me!" she said. "I had quite forgotten; I don't believe you have dined, Mrs. Pollen. We dined rather early to-day; a sort of dinner. We were all rather put out. Do let us get you something?"

"No, thanks; it's very kind of you, but I couldn't. I only dine when I like; I am not tied to dinner, like a stupid man. I have to go across to Fitzurse House; I shall be there if any one wants me for another hour."

"May I go with you?" Camiola said, eagerly.

"Only too glad of your company, my dear, if you will."

As the two were getting into the carriage, Mrs. Pollen said in a low tone to Camiola—

"Not a word about that until we are alone at home."

She pressed Camiola's hand with reassuring warmth. So they talked of indifferent things during the short drive.

Meanwhile, where was Walter Fitzurse while these few who might still be called in some sense his friends were planning to give him a chance of winning back his wife's forgiveness and affection?

Walter never liked having to wait for anything or anybody; and this night he was more than unusually impatient. Night had fallen; the stars came out. He was a dreamer who might under better auspices have had something of the poet in him; he found his present situation interesting and romantic. His own story stood out striking and poetic before his mind. He was on the verge, it would seem, of ruin, after having had a short but splendid success. He was like the monarch described by Burns, on whose head the crown had been for one hour. He had won his young and high-born wife only to deceive her and be cast off by her. All this was picturesque, and it became more so as the evening darkness grew and the stars came out. His sensuous vanity found a certain charm and consolation in the romantic conditions of his fall. Already, as has been said, weary of waiting, and not believing that either Janette or his emissary would give way very soon, a fancy took him to wander into the streets of Fitzurseham, where now in the darkness he would hardly be recognized, and try what sensations the sight of the old familiar places would call up in his mind. He turned from the rectory, leaving word with Mrs. Pollen's coachman that if he were wanted he would be back shortly; and he walked slowly into the town.

As he walked on he was, as usual, mentally acting a little play, with himself for the hero. He was no longer Walter Fitzurse, the

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husband of Lady Letitia Lisle's daughter, the relative and *protégé* of Mrs. Pollen, the student of law and letters, with chambers in the Temple and a home in the West End. He was the Walter Fitzurse who had just left the ancient foundation and was beginning life, or rather beginning to think how he should begin life. He was the lover of Vinnie Lammas. Dear little Vinnie! After all, might it not have been better with him if he had never given her up; never been tempted to throw her over? All the memories of his youth were with her. When he loved her, even the shadows were hopeful; a roseate future could be seen shining through them. Now they had settled into dun banks of gloom. Many a time about this same hour of the evening had he gone to Vinnie's house to see her. Full of the thought he turned his steps that way. He was now the old Walter Fitzurse—the old young Walter Fitzurse—going to see his sweetheart, Vinnie Lammas, after having had an hour or two of shorthand under Christian Pilgrim's care. See, there before him, not far, is the row of houses—the Terrace, as it is called—in which Vinnie lives. Many a night when he thus came to see her, he found her standing at her door on the top of the high flight of steps, waiting for his coming, knowing he would come. It soothed and gratified his humour thus to play at being the old Walter Fitzurse, to feed himself with memories. Yes, there is her house; there is light in the windows where there was always light then. He had almost an intention to open the little iron gate quietly and go up the steps just to carry out more fully the idea that the past had come back. He was thinking this over, wondering whether he could do it unheard and unseen. He was now at the gate and had his hand on the latch, uncertain, and, looking suddenly up, there he saw Vinnie standing at her door exactly as in the old time, just as if she had been waiting for her lover's coming.

CHAPTER XLI.

POOR PILGRIM!

VINNIE could hardly believe the evidence of her senses when she saw Walter standing at the gate. He had his hand upon the latch; he was about to lift it; he was then deliberately coming to look for her! She stood for a moment uncertain what to do. Her first impulse was to go back into the house, and close the door against him; but then her mother would probably think that something was going on; might hear Walter's voice if he should call to her; would get alarmed, and would think she had been encouraging her old lover. Half the mistakes women make in life, half the wrong things they do, come from a fear that somebody or other in authority, some father or mother, or husband, will think they are making mistakes or doing wrong. So in the hope of avoiding the suspicion they justify it. This was exactly what poor Vinnie did now. She

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remained on the doorsteps after Fitzurse had seen her, after he evidently knew that she had seen him.

"Vinnie," he said, in a low voice which she heard all too distinctly; "come down; I want to speak to you."

Some of the old gentle authority of the lover was in the voice. Vinnie came down the steps and stood on a level with him; only the gate between them. She said probably the most indiscreet thing she could have said under the circumstances.

"Hush, pray; mamma might hear you."

Then he knew he could make her listen to him as long as he thought fit. "I want to speak to you, Vinnie," he said.

"Oh, why did you come here?" she asked imploringly. "I don't want to see you or speak to you; we have nothing to do with each other any more. Do go away. Some one might see you."

There was genuine alarm in her voice and her words. Some one might see him? Who was the some one? Christian Pilgrim, no doubt—her new lover. *That* was what she feared.

"I am very unhappy, Vinnie," Fitzurse went on to say.

"Oh, but how can I help you?" Vinnie pleaded. "It is no fault of mine; I can't do anything to make you happy. Why should you not be happy? If you want to know who is unhappy—well——" She did not finish the sentence. Its incompleteness made it only the more expressive. "I must go," she added hastily.

"Not yet; not just for a moment. Do you know that every one is against me? Do you know that I haven't a friend in the world left? Do you know that my wife has left me?"

Vinnie could hardly suppress a little scream of surprise at this piece of news thus blurted out.

"Your wife has left you—Miss Lisle?" Vinnie in her eagerness called Janette by her maiden name. What she meant to put to Walter was this: "Do you expect me to believe that the well-brought-up, admirable daughter of the Rector has done anything that a wife ought not to do? I don't believe it."

"She has left me," he said; "I mean, she has gone back to her father's house, and will not live with me any more."

"Oh!" Vinnie gasped out, in mingled pity and wonder.

"Yes, she has gone back to her father; and she will not even see me; she hates me."

The girl's heart was melted with compassion for him, and with a strange egotistic sentiment, as if something had happened which gave her a right to console him and to listen to his confidences. She would not send him away now for her mother or any one.

"I am sorry," she said. And she was sorry, really sorry, even although conscious of this other feeling at her heart. He was in trouble, and she lamented for him; but still, still there was something soothing in the thought that in his grief he had come to her for consolation, and that she ought not to deny him.

"Won't you come in," she said timidly,—"Walter?" A long time had passed, long at least for her, since she had called him by

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his name before. "Mamma would be so glad to see you; she was always very fond of you."

"No, I don't want to see her; I couldn't look her in the face. She would be glad to know that everything had gone wrong with me; she would think it served me right, and so it does."

"Oh, my goodness! you don't know mamma. She isn't like that, not a bit. She would be very sorry for you, as I am."

"Yes, I know you are; I came to see you—to tell you. I thought it would be a comfort to hear your voice. You are the only one on earth who cares for me—and to think how I have acted to you! Can you ever forgive me?"

"Don't talk of forgiving; don't think about all that any more. I don't blame you; and mamma doesn't blame you, I don't think, or not much. I wish you would come in and see her. I don't like your standing out here, and people might see."

"There is some one you are thinking of, Vinnie; some one you don't want to see me here with you."

"No, there's nobody," the girl said bravely; "nobody now. I don't mind who sees me so far as I am concerned, now that I know you are in trouble and have come to talk to your old friends about it. If you were happy, and all right and that, it would be different; but when one is in trouble why shouldn't he come for sympathy to his old friends? We were very old friends of yours—Walter."

For the second time she called him by his name. He put his hand over the railing of the little gate and took her hand in it.

"I am so sorry for you," she said simply. "What was it for? Why did she—your wife—why did she quarrel with you? I always heard she was so good."

"She is very good; she is far too good for me. She thought she had reason to believe that I didn't love her as much as I loved—well—some one else. She thought I kept a secret from her."

Vinnie had withdrawn her hand long before this. He spoke with his eyes fixed on hers. She thoroughly misunderstood him. Her world was a very narrow one, and she could not help being egotistic. Besides, he had given her to understand that day in the old churchyard that he was still fond of her, Vinnie, and that he was sorry now he had not married her. She grew red and hot, her lips trembled, she cast her eyes down.

"Oh, Walter, I'm so sorry. But that was a mistake, such a dreadful mistake. You never cared for me really in that way at all. No, no, you never did, never! You thought you did at one time, and so did I; but I know since then that it wasn't true. Oh, if that was all, you can have no trouble in making it up with your wife. To think that she should believe that!"

Fitzurse saw the misapprehension into which Vinnie had fallen, and he did not propose to help her out of it. On the contrary, it appeared to him highly satisfactory and fortunate. He had intended telling her some story about his wife having fallen into a groundless jealousy of him on account of some great and beautiful

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lady—he liked to be thought of, even by Vinnie, as exciting the admiration of beautiful ladies of high rank—and of assuring Vinnie that he was not to blame in the least, and obtaining thus her admiration and her sympathy. But the turn things took seemed quite as agreeable to his vanity.

"I shall say nothing," he said mysteriously, gloomily; "it would not be right for me. A man cannot crush an old affection wholly out of his heart all in a moment. Well, I thought I would tell you, Vinnie; I should not like you to hear harsh things said of me, and to believe them. I only ask you not to do that. There are enemies who will try to injure me in every way; I only ask you not to believe all they say, not to think the worst of me. Think the best of me you can, Vinnie—perhaps you may not see me again. There; I have said all I wanted to say; I came to say that. Good night, Vinnie; good-bye."

He had not come to say that, or to say anything; he had not come to see her at all; he had not had any expectation of seeing her. He came because it pleased and soothed him to play his little play of being Walter Fitzurse, the lover of Vinnie Lammas, all over again. But as there was a chance put in his way of starting another theatric little scene, with himself again for its hero, he welcomed the chance, and saw himself in the part in a moment, without any previous study or rehearsal.

"Good-bye," she murmured. "Oh, I shall be so distressed about you. How shall I know if anything happens for good? Won't you let me know somehow? May I speak to Mrs. Pollen?"

"No," he answered abruptly; "it is better not. But as you care to hear about me, Vinnie, you shall hear. I will take care of that."

He felt that he had now reached the proper dramatic moment for a parting. He pressed her hand again over the gate, and went hurriedly away, as one who feels that he is bound to keep down his emotions, and fears that if he lingers he may not be able to keep them down. The girl looked after him through the gathering night. Oh, how deeply she felt compassion and commiseration for him! There was no trace of anger in her heart towards him; she never thought of blaming him for her disappointment and her blighted life; she was only sorry for him now that his wife had turned against him—and on her account. She did not believe that Walter loved her, Vinnie, or ever had really loved her—that had been made clear to her long ago. She was angry in her heart with the jealous wife who had misconceived him; she longed to go to her and tell her what she knew to be the truth, and get her to become reconciled to him again. Even as she stood and looked after him, Vinnie had some wild project of the kind coming up in her mind. Still, sure as she was that he did not love her, there was something sweet in the thought that he was in trouble about her, and that he came to her for sympathy and for consolation. Gazing after him, she did not see that some one was coming up to

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the house from the other direction. In a moment she heard Christian Pilgrim's voice, and she turned round in utter confusion. A man must have been actually sightless who did not see the distress and alarm painted on her face and staring out of her eyes as she turned and looked at him.

"What are you doing here, Vinnie? Who has been with you? Who has just been leaving you?"

"Mr. Pilgrim, what questions you do ask! I have been standing here at the door for some time. I often do."

"Something has happened, or you wouldn't look like that."

"Nothing has happened; nothing that concerns anybody."

"Who has been with you?"

"I wish you wouldn't ask questions," she answered angrily. "I don't want to be catechised. I am not a child at a Sunday school, Mr. Pilgrim. Will you come in?"

"Who is inside?"

"Mamma only."

"Has nobody been with you?"

"Nobody." Vinnie chose to construe his question as meaning "Has nobody been in the house with your mother and you;" and therefore thought herself free to give it a decided negative.

Pilgrim felt very doubtful. He did not like to admit for a moment the idea that the girl was telling him an untruth; and yet it was certain that she was distressed and alarmed about something; and that she was keeping back something from him. He felt almost satisfied that it was from her gate he had seen somebody going quickly away as he was coming up. He shook his head sorrowfully, and did not pursue the inquiry. What would be the use? he thought; why drive her into telling lies? He supposed that women were all like that; had always some little secret which they kept to themselves. Up to this moment he had not had the least suspicion that it might have been Walter Fitzurse whom he had seen leaving her. If he was admitting any suspicion of a definite form, it was that Vinnie had found some new admirer, and had perhaps been entering on a little flirtation with him. He always expected that something of the kind would happen; he had been wondering every day when it would happen. Ruefully he had to own to himself that the girl was twining herself round his heart without effort or consciousness of her own; that she was every day growing more and more necessary to his existence. It was beginning to be borne in upon him that some day he would have to ask her to marry him. He would have done so before this but that he thought there was still too keen a memory of Walter in her heart, and that he ought to give her a longer season of widowhood, as it might well be called in her case.

"I can't go in, Vinnie," he said, with a softer manner; "I have to go back to the rectory. Mrs. Pollen sent me out to look for—for a man she wants to see; and he is in Fitzurseham somewhere, but I can't find him."

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"Has Mrs. Pollen come back here—to-night?" Vinnie asked in surprise. "I suppose she will want me? Hadn't I better go?"

"Well, perhaps you might as well come over and see her; it is likely she may want you, although she didn't say so."

"She wouldn't say it," said Vinnie, "not at this hour; she is so kind and considerate, and never wants to give any trouble. I'll go at once. Shan't I go with you, if you are going back?"

"Yes; you had better come with me. Tell your mother. I'll wait here for you."

"Tell me first," she said, "has anything happened? Mamma will like to know."

"There's trouble at the rectory," Pilgrim answered slowly. "It's no use making a secret of it, Vinnie; you will come to know it soon enough, and every one else too. There's a wronged wife at the rectory; come back to the home of her father and mother. *You* were not the only deceived one, Vinnie; nor the worst."

Vinnie looked up at him angrily. "You are speaking of Walter Fitzurse?"

"I am. He has deceived his wife; as he does every one."

"It's not true," Vinnie answered fiercely. "It's all untrue! I know it is. His wife is a foolish, jealous woman, and she is wrong, quite wrong about him. Yes, I know it; I do."

As if by a flash of light Pilgrim found the whole truth revealed to him. "You have seen Walter Fitzurse?" he said; "it was he who left you just now?"

"Yes, it was. What then? Why shouldn't he come and see me? He is wrongfully accused, and he came to tell me not to believe anything against him; and I don't believe it."

"My God!" Pilgrim exclaimed; "you love that creature yet!"

"I wish you wouldn't speak so loud, Mr. Pilgrim; you might see, if you didn't lose your temper, that there are people passing; I suppose you don't want them to hear? What does it matter to any one whether I love him or not? He doesn't love me, and he is married, and if I could bring him and his wife together again there's nothing I wouldn't do, almost. You needn't stay for me—mamma will go with me to Fitzurse House."

She turned from him in anger, and ran up the steps and went in. She hated him for the moment, she was utterly unjust to him, thinking he had been utterly unjust to Walter. She left him standing there; and Pilgrim felt the blood rushing to his head in such a way as to set him giddy. He leaned against the gate for a moment to steady himself.

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CHAPTER XLII.

NEWS FROM THE SEAT OF WAR.

"Now," thought Camiola to herself, as Mrs. Pollen and she got out of the carriage and were entering Fitzurse House, "we must have this out." She meant that she must really know what Mrs. Pollen intended when she made her proposal about the escort of Albanian Joseph. "Is that her sympathy—to make a farce of one's feelings?"

They went into the music-room.

"Do you know," Mrs. Pollen said, "that I suddenly discover that I am hungry? I told them at the rectory that I wasn't, and I wasn't then; but now I am. I hope the resources of this household are equal to the emergency. They don't generally amount to much about this hour of the evening. Will you help me to eat something, Camiola—supposing I can get anything?" Mrs. Pollen rang the bell.

"No," Camiola answered bluntly, "I am not hungry; I have dined; and besides, I want to have a quarrel out with you first, Mrs. Pollen."

"First? Do you mean before I have anything to eat, dear? Is not that taking me rather at an unfair advantage? Do you remember the Scottish proverb—I think it is Scottish—about the full man and the fasting?"

"I don't; but I'll put off my quarrel if you like until after you have had something to eat. But I really have a quarrel."

"I am very glad," Mrs. Pollen said; "I like quarrels."

Her maid now came, and Mrs. Pollen gave her some orders and sent her away.

"Now then, Camiola, go ahead. My food will not be ready, I dare say, for some minutes at least; and we can have our battle-royal over in that time, I trust."

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me very serious."

"Good gracious! Shall I accompany you on the organ, with something beginning softly, then getting solemn, and rising to crash and strife?"

"I am very serious, Mrs. Pollen; and I want you to be so too, please. You know what I think of you, and how I trust to you—and—well, I think you have won all our hearts here. But now tell me why—why—did you go on so about your imaginary Joseph? Do our troubles seem to you only matter for laughter? What would poor Lady Letitia have felt if she were to know who the Albanian is that you were proposing to send with us to Egypt?"

"Yes, she would be rather amazed; now wouldn't she? I really did enjoy the comedy of the situation for the moment, Camiola. Yes, dear, I am wicked enough for that. I really did enjoy it. Fancy my Albanian Joseph going out to escort you

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safely into the outstretched arms of Georgie! Nothing in Labiche could be more funny! There, now you do look angry. You think me very heartless, don't you? My dear, I have your interests at heart all the time and all the same, I can assure you."

Camiola felt that tears were coming into her eyes.

"I do believe the girl is going to cry," Mrs. Pollen said. "Well, I am not sorry, Camiola. I don't believe in girls who don't cry; and, anyhow, it is better you should cry about this now than later on. I wasn't by any means quite in jest when I talked of sending my Albanian along with you. If you go, Camiola, he goes too—take my word for it—in one capacity or another, if I can prevail upon him, and I think I can."

"Not if I asked him not to go; and you would not persevere, dear Mrs. Pollen, if I begged you not, and told you once again that it would not be of any use."

"It will be of use. Look here, girl, you are just now in the position from which only a very obtrusive and strong-willed friend can save you; and I am determined to be that very obtrusive and strong-willed friend. You may be angry with me; I don't mind. If you were lying down in the snow of some Alpine pass and insisting on going to sleep there, as I have seen folks do more than once, and I kept shaking you, I dare say you would be angry at the moment, but I shouldn't mind, and you would thank me after."

"I think I should like to lie down in the snow somewhere and die now; just die and be out of the whole thing."

"Yes; but not much comes of talking in that way. Death is not at all necessary to extricate you from your trouble. It's all a trouble created by absurd sentimentality and mistaken self-sacrifice. I quite understand how you feel towards the Lisles. They are your oldest friends, but you have no right to sacrifice your youth, and your life, and your love to them; and they have no right to accept such a sacrifice. What about Bertie Romont? Is he nothing in the matter? Is he to be sacrificed? Not if I know it."

"I am not certain that I care so much for him now," Camiola said tremulously. "He disappointed me—he deceived me, I was going to say. He had no right to get at the secret of a woman's heart in that way. I don't think I ought to forgive it. He thought he might try any device, I suppose, perhaps because I am not the daughter of some great house." And then she stopped, and could have bitten her tongue for saying these latter words.

"Camiola! *you* to say such a thing—and of *him*! You know that it isn't true; you know it as well as I do. I am ashamed to hear you say such a thing."

"Yes, I know it isn't true. I don't know why I said it. I couldn't believe anything like that about him; but I was angry; and I am angry; and I think it would be the meanest want of spirit on any girl's part if she didn't resent such treatment."

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"Well, I can't see that there was much harm in that. I should have liked the man all the better who did as much for me, if he were my lover. Anyhow, it wasn't exactly an unpardonable sin; and it wasn't his doing, to begin with—it was my doing; all mine. I had to argue and bully him into it, I can assure you, and to tell him that he wouldn't be worth a girl's love if he couldn't bring himself to do that much."

"He ought not to have asked advice or taken it in such a matter—about *me*."

"Are we vain? Are we proud? Have we pretty high notions of ourselves?" Mrs. Pollen said, with a smile. "Why, Camiola, my dear child, I never knew you had half these defects! This is quite a revelation of your character to me. Why, you are just as perverse and self-conceited in your way, and as full of notions, as any of us. I thought you were something approaching to perfection; and now see how you look—all red, and frowning, and hot, and out of temper. Come here, dear."

She drew the half-angry, half-amused Camiola by main force up to a great round mirror in a heavy silver frame, that glittered on the wall like an antique shield. "Look at yourself there. Isn't that pretty?"

Camiola could not help laughing in all her wrath: she looked, and then looked away.

"Oh, I have faults enough, I know—that's certain; and I grant you—I would even if I had not seen myself in the glass—that the uncontrolled exhibition of them does not exactly improve my personal appearance."

"Well now, there, do you know, I don't quite agree with you. I think I never saw you looking better. I think that little burst of temper and that little outbreak of self-conceit become you ever so much."

"But really, I don't think it was self-conceit. I didn't mean it for self-conceit," Camiola pleaded humbly.

"Of course you didn't; who ever did? You meant it only for rightful self-assertion; quite a different thing, isn't it?"

"Indeed, I don't think I am self-conceited. I hope I am not. But there are things that one thinks one has a right to resent."

"I prefer to stick to the self-conceit, Camiola. I like you all the better for your faults. I should hate perfection in petticoats, if I could see it, which happily one never can. But to return, as they say in the novels. I was Bertie Romont's evil genius in the Albanian masquerade business; he acted on my advice and my importunity, and do you think I am going to desert him after having brought him into the trouble? Not I; not if I know it. You'll have to fight us both, Camiola. We'll carry you off in the end. There, you are getting angry again; you think me an awfully intrusive person, but I don't mind."

"I am sure you mean it all in kindness to me."

"No; not all to you, dear; in kindness to *him* too."

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Camiola blushed. "But there are others to be thought of—one must have some sense of duty."

"Meantime, my dear," Mrs. Pollen said, cutting her short, "you will give up the Egyptian expedition, won't you? So much you will concede to me? If not, I shall positively bring my Albanian Joseph on the stage again. There is no need of your going now. Poor little Mrs. Fitzurse can accompany her mother, and will be glad to be out of the way, no doubt. She will never return to *him*; you may be sure of that. I wonder if he has returned, or where he is? I sent Pilgrim to look for him, and I have not heard since either of seeker or of sought. I begin to grow anxious—I don't know why."

"Meanwhile, you are forgetting your dinner."

"True; so I am. Then our quarrel is out?"

"I am not able to quarrel with you; I am disposed to quarrel with fate and myself and everything. Oh, I am very unhappy."

"Your happiness is in your own hands."

"It isn't; oh, it isn't! Do try to understand me. I couldn't be happy if I thought Lady Letitia and all of them were wretched. I couldn't be happy if poor Georgie were killed. And then, how do I know—I don't know—whether *he* really cares for me or not?"

"My dear, you can't be absurd enough to doubt about that. I saw it long ago."

"I do doubt about it. So many things have been impelling him. You yourself, Mrs. Pollen, have talked of me, I know, in a way that might make any young man think he was in love with me. Yes; I may as well speak it out now. I think sometimes that he would never have given a thought to me if I hadn't been put into his head—or thrown at his head! Think of a man finding out that you were in love with him before there was any appearance of his being in love with you! Why, it is a sort of Benedick and Beatrice affair; only that all the ridicule and shame fall on me only. I don't think any woman with the decent pride of a woman could give herself away under such conditions. Oh, well—there; I won't say any more about it."

"I wonder you are not more angry with me, if you think I have done so badly in all this," Mrs. Pollen said, with a certain metallic sound of displeasure in her tone.

"I can't be angry," Camiola said simply; "I can't be angry, because I know you did it all for *him*."

She got up and turned away. She feared she had said too much; yet she could not help saying it. There was a terrible fighting in her heart between love, pride, and a mistaken, devoted sense of duty.

"I wonder if a girl was ever tried in this way before?" she asked of herself with pardonable egotism.

Mrs. Pollen's maid came in to announce dinner and to bring a letter for Camiola. It was from Lady Letitia; a hasty scrawl.

"Oh, Mrs. Pollen!" Camiola exclaimed. "Such news; such glorious news, just come from Georgie!"

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With stammering voice and words all running into each other she read Lady Letitia's short note. A telegram from the War Office had just reached the rectory; the expedition was over and was quite successful; Georgie had behaved splendidly; was to be mentioned by the general in command; and had not had a wound of any kind. The campaign would soon be over.

"Isn't it splendid?" Camiola asked breathlessly.

"Oh, dear me!" was Mrs. Pollen's comment. "What a hero he will be now, to be sure."

"Yes; isn't he brave? I always knew he was. Oh, I do feel so happy! If he had been killed I should never have forgiven myself. Now that he is safe and has done so splendidly I don't so much mind what happens."

"What about going to Egypt now?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"Now? Well, I suppose I needn't go now; he is all right," and Camiola blushed.

"I see," said Mrs. Pollen.

CHAPTER XLIII.

PILGRIM GIVES HIS WARNING.

NIGHT was blackening down upon the place as Pilgrim turned from Vinnie's door. After he had steadied himself for a moment or two he made a wild rush forward; he rushed like one in pursuit of some victim on whose trail he has suddenly come. All the passion of his heart was absorbed into hatred for Walter Fitzurse and resolve to be revenged upon him. Nothing being actually known to him, he magnified Fitzurse's guilt altogether; at least, he magnified its deliberateness. He was convinced that Walter had set himself again to fascinate Vinnie; he did not even know whether Vinnie had not been the cause of the quarrel between Walter and his wife. In the bitterness of his heart he wished he had never helped to save Vinnie from the river. If he had not told Romont that she was likely to come there to drown herself, Romont never would have known, and she would have been drowned. Better that, a thousand times better, he thought, than to live to be deceived by Fitzurse. He began to ask himself whether it would not be an act of mere justice if he were to interpose and kill Fitzurse before it was yet too late, before Vinnie had really been brought to grief and shame. Dreamers of Pilgrim's order are dangerous men when their dreaming gives to their hatred the form of an act of justice. They are apt to make that dream a reality. Pilgrim was himself now distinctly conscious that he was moving like one in a dream. The men and women who passed him in his rapid way might have been shadows. If a ghost come from the grave had walked by his side he would not have been surprised or dismayed. Nothing could seem to him

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more spectral than himself; phantoms appeared, vanished, and reappeared around him as he went.

Suddenly he was brought to a stand by a short, odd figure which came in his way and barred it. This proved itself no phantom. The thin piping voice of Jethro Merridew spoke out of the night and shadow which seemed to Pilgrim to be within his own being as well as without it. He turned wild, wondering eyes on the little man.

"Whither away so fast, fair cousin?" asked Merridew. Since it had been found that Pilgrim and he were connected by marriage, Jethro had taken to calling him "fair cousin." They had been brought together a great deal by reason of the inquiries they had to make, and Pilgrim's kindly melancholy nature was always full of compassion for the half-crazed old man. "Who rides so late," Jethro went on, "in night and in wind? Hurrah! Hurrah! the dead rides fast; dost fear to ride with me?"

"I'm in a hurry, Jethro," Pilgrim said, after a gasp or two and a determined effort to pull himself together.

"Life is all a hurry," Jethro said, "and life and death ride together a good deal; just like the pair in the ballad I've been quoting from."

"Ay, that's true; they do indeed," Christian answered grimly.

"Do you know," Jethro said, laying his thin hand on Pilgrim's arm, "I believe I shall have glad news soon. What wind so sweet as that which brings to parent heart the wandering child?"

"Have you heard anything?" Pilgrim asked, trying hard to keep down his impatience, and fearing that it would overmaster him before he could get rid quietly of poor Jethro.

"I have been dreaming dreams; I have seen her in my dreams come back all bright and glorious; I have dreamed the same dream again and again. She comes in grand procession, like a fairy queen. For as I am a man I think this lady to be my child Cordelia! Oh, what happiness it will be when she comes."

Tears were big in the old man's eyes; Pilgrim could see them by the not very brilliant light of a Fitzurseham gas lamp; Fitzurseham was very chary about its local illuminations. In all Pilgrim's own distress he could not but feel a pang of pity for Merridew. In the contemplation of Merridew's craze he felt himself grow for the moment less wild than he had been.

"Let us hope she will come some time, soon," he said soothingly. "God is very good; and you have waited a long time." Then his mind went back to its own grievance again, and he said, "I too have been waiting a long time, a long time."

"You? What have you been waiting for?" Jethro asked with some interest. He was shrewd enough on all matters but those which concerned his lost daughter and the certainty and manner of her return. "You have no daughter to wait for."

"I have been waiting for everything that makes life worth having; and I have not got anything I waited for. Perhaps it was

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near and somebody came between. Look here, Jethro—suppose you knew your daughter was coming to you——"

"Suppose I knew? Man, I tell you I *do* know she *is* coming."

"Well—suppose at the last moment some one—some man—came in between you and her and took her from you, what would you do to him?"

Jethro's eyes blazed with the fire of hatred and insanity, and he clutched Pilgrim's strong arm with his thin fingers while he almost screamed out—

"What would I do to him? Why kill him; kill, kill, kill him, to be sure. Are you mad, Pilgrim, to ask me such a question? Let me look at you." He dragged Pilgrim under the light of the lamp, and peered into his face with fiercely eager stare.

"I think I must be getting mad indeed," Pilgrim said, "when I talk in such a way to you. I ask your pardon, Merridew. I was thinking of something else. I am going on this way. I hope to hear good news from you soon." Pilgrim was growing ashamed of himself and of his lack of self-control.

"You do look strange, though," Merridew said. His flame of wrath had suddenly gone out. "You do look strange, and it is a wild night, a naughty night to swim in, as the mad king says. Go home, Pilgrim. It is not good to be abroad on a night like this. People who are out to-night are apt to get mad somehow. I am a little queer myself, and our old friend, Walter Fitzurse—that self-conceited young burlesque Lochinvar, that ran away with the Rector's crazy daughter—he seems to me to be as mad as a hatter."

"Why? How? Have you seen him lately?"

"Saw him just now, or his ghost—it may have been a ghost—in the old churchyard, down by the river; river that rollest by the ancient walls where dwells the lady of love; when she——"

Pilgrim did not wait for any more of the quotation, but ran in the direction of the churchyard. The gates were closed, but he knew well enough the easy way of entrance over the low wall which poor Vinnie had crossed on the night of her forlorn enterprise. He went in, and wandering along one of the paths saw Fitzurse seated on the river-wall and gazing on the clouds which were drifting over the sky. In truth, Walter was trying to conjure poetry out of the place, the hour, the evening clouds, the river, and his own darkened destiny. He had got on to the track of something rather fine when he was aroused by the crash of Pilgrim's feet on the gravel, and he stood up.

"I have been looking for you," Pilgrim said sternly.

"Yes? What then?"

"I don't know what then, and I don't much care. They want you at the rectory. Mrs. Pollen told me to find you."

"Thank you; I will go."

"Stop! that isn't all. I saw you with Vinnie Lammas this evening. I saw you talking with her."

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Walter did not like this, but he had to make the best of it. He kept down his anger.

"Well, why should I not speak to her? I have known her a long time. We are old friends."

"Friends? Friends? You have been the girl's worst enemy. She was free of you at last, and now you take to persecuting her again. You let her alone. Listen to what I say; if I find you ever seek out that girl again or go near her or try to have any secret talks with her—mind, I give you fair warning, and I'll keep my word——"

"Yes, what will you do?"

Fitzurse was not wanting in mere physical courage; but there was something unnerving in the manner of this strong, prematurely bowed grey man straightening himself up with a fierce and resolute effort, and approaching nearer and nearer with livid face and glaring eyes. Walter shrank back instinctively; he suddenly remembered Pilgrim's great strength. Pilgrim caught him with both hands, one hand on each side of his coat collar, and held him there, steadied him so that he might look more directly into his eyes; and said in a deep hoarse voice—

"I'll kill you, kill you dead—dead!"

Then he loosed his hands so suddenly that Walter staggered back. Like one breaking away from some fearful temptation, Pilgrim scrambled on to the river-wall and dropped from it down upon the ledge of strand, which the tide now left bare below. The drop must have been some fourteen or fifteen feet at least; but to Pilgrim's mood it seemed as easy as stepping off an ordinary side-walk. The very manner of this sudden and strange disappearance enhanced in Walter's mind the uncanny and ominous nature of the whole scene. Pilgrim seemed like one possessed by a demon. His words sank into Walter's heart and filled him with a gloomy presentiment of ill and danger which he had not quite shaken off when he reached the rectory.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CAMIOLA STILL INTERCEDES.

WHAT was the feeling which filled Camiola's heart when she heard the news that her lover was safe thus far, and that he had proved himself a hero? Mrs. Pollen, we may be sure, watched the expression on her face very keenly, and soon came to a conclusion.

"I see," she said quietly; "you are getting reconciled to yourself, Camiola, now that Georgie has turned out so fine a fellow." Then she stopped purposely, and noted the sudden contraction of Camiola's eyebrows, and the look that seemed like a hasty protest. "No, I didn't say that, Camiola."

"Didn't say what, Mrs. Pollen?"

"Didn't say what you were going to disclaim. I said you were

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growing reconciled to *yourself*, not to *him*. What you were thinking of was—'Perhaps he can do without me now.'"

Camiola coloured. "Yes," she answered, "that is what I was thinking of; that was what first came into my mind. They will be all so proud of him, and he will be so delighted, that I think, perhaps, he will not want me so much now. But I almost wish you hadn't guessed it all the same."

"I didn't guess it; I never guess things. I saw it; I read it in your eyes."

"Then I wish I had thought of closing my eyes just at the moment," Camiola said, with a smile that was far from gladsome. "I wish I had closed them and kept them closed until that thought had passed out of my mind. But it doesn't matter much after all. You know so many things about me, you may as well keep this thing a secret as all the rest."

"Just so," Mrs. Pollen said complacently. "I do know a good deal about you."

There was a strange conflict of feeling in Camiola's mind. She insisted that if Georgie wished to marry her she must still marry him. She knew Mrs. Pollen would work heaven and earth to prevent her. She was sometimes impatient and almost angry at the sort of mastery over her which Mrs. Pollen assumed. She was often almost inclined to resent the persistency with which Mrs. Pollen maintained the cause of Romont; and yet she clung to Mrs. Pollen as to a protecting power, as her last defence against a marriage with the young hero of the Egyptian fight. She felt that it was as Mrs. Pollen had put it; Mrs. Pollen was fighting Camiola's own battle against Camiola herself. Just as this feeling came clearly into her mind, Mrs. Pollen suddenly said—

"Yes, Camiola, and I'll win the battle in the end, you'll see!"

The girl positively started and looked amazed into Mrs. Pollen's face on thus finding the hidden thought of her bosom instantly translated into words—the moment it became a thought distinct enough to be recognized even by her herself.

"Shall I tell you how I got to that?"

"Indeed, I should like to know. It seems to me positively marvellous—like witchcraft."

"Witchcraft? No, not even wit; only observation. I saw the expression that came over your face when I got up—these sudden expressions are the flash-lights that guide me always, the expressions that come before the mind has any time to compose itself and make up *its* mind as to what it ought to think and feel and all that, don't you know? Well, the expression on your face was just like that of a child who has been scolded by her mother, and yet is afraid from some movement of the mother that she is going to be left alone, and doesn't like it. Now I have been scolding you very often lately, and you have been angry; but you seemed for the moment as if you were afraid I was going to leave you. Why? Because you feel that I am fighting your battle against yourself, and

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you begin to think that I may win in the end. There you are, Camiola—'that only is the witchcraft I have used,' as the Immortal Bard, I think, expresses it."

Camiola said no more on the subject. Christian Pilgrim presently came in looking as pale and distraught as if he had seen a ghost, and told Mrs. Pollen that he had seen Mr. Fitzurse, and that he had no doubt Mr. Fitzurse was then at the rectory.

"Then we'll not go over for a little, yet," Mrs. Pollen said to Camiola. "We'll give them an interval to arrange a treaty of peace if they can. I think I'll have my dinner now. Come and look on. Mr. Pilgrim, let them light the music-room. We'll go there after I have devoured my food, Camiola."

The devouring of the food was not a very lengthy operation. Mrs. Pollen was a poor eater. Camiola, with her healthy young appetite, could have eaten twice as much.

"There," said Mrs. Pollen, "I was so hungry; now that's done with. I am glad to be past the time when women have to affect not to be able to eat anything."

"I am sure I never affect anything of the kind," Camiola declared. "I can eat, and I don't care who knows it."

"But then, do you know, I think you are rather wanting in affectation. I fancy a little affectation adds a charm. I sometimes wonder you can fetch the men, Camiola. You don't seem to me to do anything to attract them."

"I don't attract them, except my unfortunate Georgie, and—and—yes, very few others. I didn't attract the right one—in time, anyhow."

"I suspect you would have found that you did, if only you had been a poor girl. Young men of spirit are sadly afraid of being thought to make up to a girl for her money."

"If I loved—cared for a girl—if I were a man, I shouldn't stop to think whether she had money or not," said Camiola, grandly.

Some of this talk went on as they were going through the long corridor to the music-room. Now Mrs. Pollen opened the door of the room, and they were going in. Camiola, who was first, drew back in surprise. Walter Fitzurse was there, standing right before them.

Nothing could be better composed and more picturesque than Fitzurse's attitude. He stood with his back leaning against the door, through which he had entered, and his arms folded. His eyes were fixed upon the carpet. His face was absolutely colourless. His lips were firmly set together, with the expression of one who is now made up for any fortune. There was, however, a slight penitential stoop of the shoulders which seemed to appeal to the charity and indulgence of those who might look upon a forlorn youth, victim of errors which he did not propose to defend, but victim also of an adverse fate. It is very difficult sometimes for one to analyze correctly one's own sensations, and say whether the compound of emotion under certain circumstances has in it

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more of pleasure or more of pain. It would be hard for us, therefore, to say whether at this moment there was more of a feeling of pleasure or of pain in the melodramatic heart of Walter Fitzurse. Certainly he felt like a ruined man, but then he also felt that the part he was playing was delightfully romantic.

"You did not expect me here?" he said, in a low and pathetic tone. "Do not go, Miss Sabine; I have nothing to say which you may not hear."

"Stay, Camiola," Mrs. Pollen said decisively. "No, I certainly didn't expect you here. How did you get in?"

"Oh!" He spoke in a voice of surprise and pain. "Have you already forgotten, so soon in the history of my misfortunes, that you once classed me among your chosen friends, and that I have still your key to let me in? I saw the lights—one of your curtains is not drawn. I wanted to see you, and I am here."

"Well, now that you are here, suppose we all sit down."

Walter placed chairs with an indescribable air of dethroned-prince about all his movements.

"You have been to the rectory?"

"I have. It is all over."

"She will not go back?"

"She will not."

"Have you seen her?"

"No; she will not see me; she refused absolutely. Her father and mother both besought her, but she would not. Well, I don't blame her. She might have forgiven, perhaps; but she would not, and Heaven knows she has had much wrong."

"She has had very much wrong," Mrs. Pollen said sharply.

"She has; I said so. Every one will say the same; every one is against me. No one feels the slightest concern for me." He looked at Camiola, and he saw that a look of pity came over her face. She did feel pity for him, he seemed so penitent and so lonely, but she remained silent. "If I could have seen her—if I could see her yet," he exclaimed passionately, "I think I could move her. It cannot be but that she loves me still."

"Oh, can't anything be done?" Camiola interposed, unable any longer to control her feelings.

Walter sent her a glance of the profoundest gratitude. It was with a feeling of almost ecstatic emotion that he found himself the object of her interest and her sympathy; for so he read her pity for him, her affection for Janette.

"Thank you, Miss Sabine," he said, in a low tone. "You have not steeled your heart against me."

"Miss Sabine's heart is still young and tender and foolish," Mrs. Pollen said. "Miss Sabine doesn't know quite as much about that paragon of animals, man, as it has been my misfortune to do. Well, about anything being done, the question is, what can be done?"

"If Miss Sabine would plead for me——" he was beginning.

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"But she won't," Mrs. Pollen broke in peremptorily.

"But I have," Camiola said; "I have done it already, I have said what I could, and it was quite in vain."

"Even to see me and hear me—even that? I ask no more. Surely she might concede that much?"

"I asked her," Camiola said pathetically, "and she wouldn't."

Mrs. Pollen was growing impatient. She was afraid Camiola's kindly heart was likely to be imposed upon by what she considered to be mere acting and attitudinizing.

"Well, the best thing is," she said, "for you to go away now, and leave me to think of what can yet be done, if anything can be done. Suppose she will not see you, what then do you propose to do?"

"The best thing for me would be death."

"Yes," Mrs. Pollen said, after a pause, as if she had been slowly considering the matter; "I rather agree with you there. I think that would be the best way out of it for all parties——"

"Mrs. Pollen!" Camiola pleaded, "how can you?"

"Well, he can't live for ever, you know," the imperturbable lady replied; "but he is not going to die just this time. So we may put that out of the question. In the event, then, of the thunderbolt failing to strike you down, or the earth not opening to swallow you, or, what is just as likely, your failing to drown or poison yourself, what do you propose to do?"

"You are very hard on me," he said, with a flush passing over his face as he felt the sting of her pitiless words, barbed by her utter disbelief in him and contempt for him. "What do you think I ought to do? Would you like me to go away, to become an exile? I will if you like."

"Becoming an exile is, I suppose, heroic for going to America or Australia? No; that isn't my idea. My idea is this—stay where you are; go on with your work at the bar, and your literary career, if you have any. Stick to your work—bite into it. Shake off once for all your rubbish and nonsense; show your wife and your wife's people that you have some stuff in you. Do that, and act like a man, and even yet things may come right with you. Above all things drop play-acting. See yourself as you are, and try to be something very different. A man could live down all this and much more; be a man; that's all I have to say."

"Then you don't wholly abandon me, even yet?"

"I? Oh, well, I'm rather a bad lot. I stick to people sometimes when all decent folk have felt compelled to throw them over. I'll see if I can do anything. A good deal will depend on yourself. I tell you candidly, I am getting tired of you. I think the best thing you can do now is to go. Leave me your address, and I will write to you when I have anything to say. Of course you are not going back to the house that belongs to Mr. Lisle?"

"Never!" he exclaimed, with indignant emphasis. "Unless I go back at Janette's wish and the wish of her parents."

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"Quite so," Mrs. Pollen said grimly.

He had intended to go back there and to keep there as long as he could, and she knew this. She knew it by the sudden fervour of his denial. He laid upon the table his card with his club address. She nodded to him and he was going. He looked so unhappy that Camiola could not help holding out her hand in pity to him. He took it, bent over it, pressed it to his lips, and was gone in a moment.

"How could you let him kiss your hand?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"I couldn't help it. I couldn't bear to see him go away like that. It is terrible to see a human creature, a man especially, brought so low and so crushed. Oh, I couldn't help giving him my hand, I couldn't, I couldn't. Don't we say every day in our prayers that we are miserable sinners? What hypocrites we are if we don't mean it, and what awful humbugs if we do mean it and yet are pitiless to other sinners. I can't do it."

"I wonder how many last chances he is to get?" Mrs. Pollen asked after a moment. "Well, I don't mind. Suppose we give him another? What do you say?"

"I would give him another," Camiola declared with promptitude and resolve. "I would give him twenty others. I think it is terrible to have these two separated for ever; they must have loved each other once. I don't recognize my dear old Janette at all in this."

"Well, *I* was always a woman of softness and of sentiment—I am like Richard the Third, I am 'too childish-foolish for this world,' Camiola. So as you back up his petition I am prepared to grant it. But how can we bring it about? She refuses positively to see him. How are we to bring them together?"

"Let him come here the day you have your mummeries; let him mingle in the crowd and come on her somehow."

"Would she come, do you think?"

"She will come, I think. She is very proud. She will want to show that the world goes on for her all the same; and Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia will be glad to see her do anything which may tend to discredit anything like scandal. If she is seen at your revelries, nine out of every ten people here will think there is nothing in the whole story about her separation from her husband."

"Dear me," Mrs. Pollen observed, "what a great deal of the wisdom of the serpent is mixed up with the harmlessness of the dove among you good people! Now, do you know that would never have occurred to me? What I mean is, that if I were determined to separate myself from my husband, I would do so in defiance of all the world, and I shouldn't care who knew it."

"But in Mr. Lisle's case it is so different," Camiola urged. "A clergyman, and a clergyman's family! Any scandal and separation of husbands and wives might do so much harm, would seem to set such a bad example."

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"Just so; why doesn't Janette think of all that, and not set the bad example?"

"I don't know. Her heart seems to be closed against him. Indeed, he is what people call a bad lot, I am greatly afraid. Still he is her husband, and I can't help pitying him."

"Nothing interests me," Mrs. Pollen said gravely, "like the wiles of the simple and the dodges of the straightforward. It is to me a subject deserving of the profoundest contemplation. So we good people are all to play a little game, the Rector as well as the rest, to make the outer public think we are not doing what we are doing? Well, anyhow, if this little game is to be played, I think yours is a capital notion. I'll write to him, and ask him to come, and tell him how he is to manage. I'll answer for his coming if you will answer for hers, Camiola."

"Indeed, I'll not answer for anything of the kind now; for all I can tell she may take some notion into her head that she ought not to go out; and if she does I could not move her from that. I will do my best, of course. She mustn't be allowed to have any suspicion that he is going to be here. How sad it all is! What disappointment, and confusion, and separation——"

"And mummery within mummery. Well, that is the way of life; and I am pleased that my mummery should now have a new and romantic interest. Don't look horrified, Camiola; I don't mean that I only care about the fun of the thing. If my mummery can help to bring these two together and make a man of that wretch, I shall be grateful to it."

"As if I didn't know you," was all Camiola said.

Now, this mummery of which they had been talking was an entertainment which Mrs. Pollen had been planning for all and sundry in Fitzurseham, and which was to take place in the restored and renovated Fitzurse House. It was to be her house-warming, in fact; and there were to be dramatic *tableaux* and much music, and various games and sports, and liberal eating and drinking. When the news came of Georgie's danger, Mrs. Pollen thought of putting it off; but now that he was known to be safe, that he had performed what she was pleased to call in her irreverent way "prodigies of valour," there seemed only the greater reason why Fitzurseham should rejoice. By a happy coincidence a travelling circus company, attracted to Fitzurseham by the fame of the new life Mrs. Pollen's settlement there had infused into the region, was coming with its show just at the same time, and Mrs. Pollen had a strong notion of engaging some of its beauty and talent, its trained dogs, and even its accomplished ponies, in order that her poor neighbours might enjoy the sight without having to pay for the pleasure. In this entertainment it was now designed that Walter Fitzurse should have his last chance.

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CHAPTER XLV.

A YOUNG MAN FROM THE DOCKS.

WALTER FITZURSE did not return any more to the West End house which he had lived in for so short a time. He remained as a resident in his chambers; oscillated for a few days between the chambers and his club. The club was now all that was left to him of his brief connection with what he considered fashionable life. Still, of course, there was the consoling thought that he was actually married to the granddaughter of an earl. Nothing could alter that fact. He was distinctly and closely connected with the aristocracy by marriage. For one who but a few years ago was a poor unfriended youth studying shorthand under Christian Pilgrim in forlorn Fitzurseham, this was not bad. In his dreamy fashion he often sat long and late in his chambers of a night thinking over this, the while he sipped whiskey and water and smoked a cigar. On the whole, he was not unhappy or much dissatisfied with what fortune had done for him.

He did not cross the water or go near Fitzurseham. It was as well, he thought, to keep away altogether from Vinnie Lammas. Not that he meant the girl any harm; but that fellow Pilgrim was so suspicious, and was getting such a madman. Pilgrim's manner and Pilgrim's threats the other night had made a painful impression on him. He sometimes woke up at night with a start from some horrible dream, in which he fancied that Pilgrim was trying to strangle him or to drown him. Once he thought that Vinnie was there, and that she made an effort to save him and shrieked for help; the shriek seemed to wake him. Another time he dreamed that Pilgrim was trying to push him over the edge of some dizzy height, and that Joseph, the Albanian, was looking on and smiling contemptuously at Walter's supplications for rescue. This dream made a most uncomfortable impression on him. He began to be convinced that something bad was to happen to him in which Pilgrim and the Albanian were to bear a part together. This was another reason for his avoiding Fitzurseham, even if he had any motive for going there just now, which he had not. He did not go to see Mrs. Pollen at her hotel; he understood from her that if she had anything to say she would send for him, and that he was not to go until then. He had still some money left, and he was sure that Mrs. Pollen had not altogether abandoned him. He was playing at studying hard for law, and he had begun ever so many things in a literary way and had not gone on with them. In truth, this self-elected literary man had no particular aptitude for literature. He was a clever young man, but his cleverness had not, thus far, taken any form.

Days and days went on, and the world seemed to be forgetting him; seemed to be doing remarkably well without him. He

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looked in at his club every day for luncheon, and occasionally dined there, but not often, for he did not wish it to be supposed that nobody ever asked him out to dine. Few of the regular club-men had come back to town; it was in the dead waste and middle of the autumn. These were days when he did not speak to a soul from morning to night except to an occasional waiter. He dined at all sorts of restaurants, varying the scene a good deal, and always dining well while the money lasted. His funds began, however, to run low. One day when he had but little left, and did not know how he was to get any more without asking Mrs. Pollen, who might refuse him, he treated himself to a particularly nice little dinner, not feeling sure that he might have such a chance for some time again. He had some excellent dry champagne and a liqueur, and he enjoyed himself in his peculiar way, feeling a certain pride in his very ruin, regarding it as an undeniable distinction. Then he looked into a little theatre, and saw part of a burlesque or *opera bouffe* or something with pretty girls in it, and not too much drapery but just drapery enough. Then he went home sentimentally desponding, and in his chambers he found two letters for him—one in a large envelope, the other in a small one. The large envelope enclosed a card of highly artistic and fanciful device, informing him that Mrs. Pollen would be at home at Fitzurse House on a certain day in the following week, and that there would be *tableaux vivants*, music, and conjuring. He had heard something about this before, but it had passed out of his memory, and in any case he presumed that he would not be expected to go. He was mistaken, however, for the small envelope enclosed a note from Mrs. Pollen, saying she particularly wished him to go to her house-warming, and telling him that if he called on her at the West End she would explain to him the reason why, and of course he assumed that it had something to do with his wife. The letter ended with the words, "Perhaps you may not have much money left; I send enclosed," and enclosed was a bank-note for one hundred pounds. That neat little sum opened up quite a vista for our prose-poet; poet, that is to say, who had not yet written any poetry. Who knows what might happen before the hundred pounds was out? He might be reconciled with Janette and living in the West End; or his genius might be discovered by some publisher, editor, or manager. He felt on the whole well content with himself and his prospects. The only thing he did not like was the having to go to Fitzurseham. He had determined not to go there; and now he must go. He felt as if there was something ominous of evil to him in that. If he went there he must meet Pilgrim; he might meet the Albanian; and then what about his dream? But he put this thought away. Who cares about dreams now, and what harm could Pilgrim and the Albanian do to him?

On the very evening when Walter received his invitation, Mrs. Pollen was dining alone in her hotel. She was very busy about

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the arrangements for her entertainment at Fitzurse House, and she was constantly receiving visits from all manner of persons—tradesmen, decorators, artificers, caterers, upholsterers, and others—whom she was employing, or who were anxious to be employed, in the preparations for the festival. Her maid, therefore, was not in the least surprised when she said—

"I wish you would tell them that I expect a young man, a young working man, from the docks, here at nine, and that he is to be shown in at once when he comes."

Nine o'clock came and the young man with it. He was shown in at once and left with Mrs. Pollen. He seemed a well-made, loose-limbed young fellow, something between a rigger and a seaman; his face and hands were pitchy as the seams of the wrecking vessel in the Bay of Biscay, whereof Sims Reeves still sings.

"No ceremony; came just as I am, you see," said the young man, with a familiarity which did not seem altogether in keeping with the manners proper to his station in life.

"All right," Mrs. Pollen said, apparently without the slightest feeling of surprise or resentment, "won't you sit down?"

"What, in these garments, and on that chair? Not if I know it. I hope I know my place better than that."

"Well, and you have really been down at the docks all day looking for work? What an absurd creature you are!"

"Looking for work? Yes; and I got work; and many a poor fellow who really wanted it didn't. I tell you what; it's an awful sight to see some of these poor chaps; the elder ones especially. I am going to write a lot about it—for the *St. James's Gazette*, I think. My heavens, what a great deal wants doing in this huge vast wilderness of a place! One gets utterly discouraged sometimes—the whole thing seems so hopeless."

"You don't appear to get discouraged."

"Oh, well, the fact is I like it; I couldn't live without the excitement just now. It keeps my own troubles out of my head, and there's a good deal in that. I should be sure to make a fool of myself somehow if I didn't try to get mixed up in the affairs of other people."

"You'll have to give up all that sort of thing when you get married, I dare say."

"I don't think so. *She's* not the sort of girl to like a man who did nothing."

The intelligent reader will not, we presume, need to be told who this young man from the docks really was.

"Well, I told you about the Egyptian expedition?"

"Yes; is it given up?"

"Not at all. It's on again. They all stick to it."

"Does *she* stick to it?"

"She does. She thinks she is bound. Are you going to stand that, I want to know?"

"No, Mrs. Pollen; my mind is made up. I won't stand it. She

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shan't go; or if she goes I will go too. I have thought all this thing out lately. She has two points of honour, and they are both mistakes. I like a woman who has points of honour; I love *her* all the more; but she is wrong, and it would be absurd to let her have her way and victimize herself. She thinks she is bound to sacrifice herself for the Lisle family; I don't. She thinks she oughtn't to give in to marrying me after the way in which I found out what she felt, and all that. I don't think anything of the kind. Now, it is plain that both she and I can't have our way in this; so I mean to take on me to act for both; I am going to have my way."

The young man from the docks struck the table emphatically with his clenched and somewhat pitchy hand.

"Respect the hotel furniture," Mrs. Pollen said; "it is rickety; it hasn't the solidity of my Fitzurseham sticks. Well, you have made rather a long speech, but I listened attentively all the time, and I entirely approve of your sentiments. I think they do equal honour to your head and heart, as the orators are in the habit of expressing it. Of course I am prepared to assist you; I go with you, Bertie, heart and soul." She spoke these last few words in a tone different from that in which she had spoken before. She dropped affected levity and chaff for the moment, and spoke in a voice of friendship, sincerity, and tenderness.

"I knew you would," he said. "I have told my mother all about this business."

"Yes; what does she say?"

"Well, of course, she never saw Camiola; but she is willing to take her on trust."

"Is she content with your marriage scheme?"

"She is; she generally likes anything I like; we get on so well together. I fancy there is a little touch of sadness to one's mother always when she finds some other woman turning up—is not that so, don't you think?"

"I don't know; I never was a mother."

"But one reads books and hears things, and I fancy it is so. But that won't affect my mother much; she is so unselfish. She has got quite out of the way of thinking about herself. Besides, I dare say she has some idea like yours, that getting married will keep me out of all manner of adventures and enterprises. She was always afraid I should get drowned, or catch fever, or small-pox, or something; now she thinks I shall have to settle down."

"Does she know that Camiola is a girl with a fortune?"

Romont looked embarrassed.

"No; she didn't ask me anything about it; and I forgot it altogether. I wish she hadn't a fortune. But I suppose it can't be helped. Do you know, Mrs. Pollen, that if I weren't so madly in love with her I should regard that confounded fortune as a serious objection. I don't think I could get over it."

"I quite understand you," Mrs. Pollen said. "I am sure if I

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were a man I would rather marry a girl who hadn't a sixpence. But that wouldn't be quite a reason for not marrying the girl one loved, would it, especially if she loved one?"

"Oh, by Jove!" Romont exclaimed, "I wouldn't give up Camiola if she were a female Crœsus!"

"I like your confidence, young man! You seem to take it quite for granted that Camiola will marry you."

"Yes, she will marry me," Romont said impetuously. "I really believe we were made for one another."

"It makes me young again," Mrs. Pollen observed, "to hear any one talk in that way; about people being made for one another. Oh, you dear, darling pair of fools—pair of lovers, I mean; and so you were made for one another, you two! From all the ages, I suppose; creation paused in its work to shape you for each other! How very nice! Well, I do really believe that you were in one sense made for one another; I thought it from the first; that is why I helped you all I could."

"You did, indeed? How lucky a fellow I am! I was telling my mother that there are three women in the world whom I adore——"

"Good gracious!" Mrs. Pollen exclaimed.

"Yes, I adore them all three, and I am in love with one of them, besides adoring her——"

"We know her name. The other is your mother, of course. But who on earth is the third?"

"As if you didn't know," he said, with beaming eyes. "Why you, of course. As if you didn't know that I adore you! Good heavens! how could I do anything else? And I can't do anything for you—not a thing; I haven't any way of showing you what I feel."

"My dear," said Mrs. Pollen, smiling through her unmistakable tears; "do you think it is nothing for me to have your friendship?"

"Oh, come, friendship won't express it—doesn't get near it."

"Well, your affection, then."

"Affection, gratitude, devotion——"

"Well, well, well, you are fond of me, Bertie, and I am fond of you. I told you the first day we met that you would like me in the end, and that I could wait."

"By Jove, you hadn't long to wait!"

"No; and I am very glad. I don't like wasting time. Life is short; it is getting particularly short with people at my time of life. I owe you a great deal, Bertie Romont; you and your sweetheart too. You two have done more to make me happy and to make me like the world and put up with it than any two people I have met, for I don't know how long; for forever, perhaps. I knew you from the first, my dear boy; I saw to your heart in a glance; and I knew her too; and I am fond of you both; and I couldn't say if I were put under cross-examination which of you I am fonder

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of, except that I suppose my general inclination is to lean towards the man. Well, there's no use in saying more about that; we understand each other. I want now to talk to you about my mummery; I want all manner of advice and assistance. First, I want you on that occasion, and for positively the last time, to assume the part of Joseph, the Albanian."

"Oh, must I really?"

"You must; I have a particular reason for it, which I will explain to you presently. You are to appear in your own character too; you are to double the part."

"All right," he said. "I'll do whatever you like."

"Good boy."

CHAPTER XLVI.

JETHRO'S DAUGHTER COMES HOME.

THE Fitzurseham people began more and more to shake their heads over poor Jethro Merridew. He was getting every day more "off his nut," as they put it gracefully. Not a few of them expressed their sense of his condition by jeering at him more loudly than ever as he passed along the street. Jethro bore their insults with a sort of prince-like contempt. Some of the better-hearted of the neighbours endeavoured to talk with him sympathetically, and to these he would say again and again that his daughter was coming home very soon now. No inquiries made on Mrs. Pollen's behalf had led to any discovery concerning the daughter. Mrs. Pollen and Pilgrim both tried as well as they could to get him to understand this, and to soften its meaning to him. But he would not listen to anything on the subject. He knew better, he said; he knew all about it. Of late he kept away from Mrs. Pollen and from Pilgrim; of late, too, Pilgrim was thinking of other things. Jethro went about his business as usual; he called people in the mornings with all his habitual regularity. When he ever went to sleep no one could tell. He certainly never slept until he had performed the last of his morning calls, and then people saw him wandering about nearly all day long afterwards. For some days now he had resolutely kept indoors when once his work of calling was done. He began not to like the streets, and to shrink from them. Those who did see him, if they were at all sympathetic, thought they saw something in his face that spoke of coming death.

The morning of the day when Mrs. Pollen was to have her entertainment Jethro made his round of calls as usual. He was tired then, and longed to sleep. He went into the Old Ferry Inn, which was just taking down its shutters to entertain early bargemen, and market gardeners, and cart drivers, and he asked for some brandy. Such indulgence was the rarest thing in Jethro's case, and the bargemen did not fail to chaff him pleasantly over his new-born drinking ways. Jethro made no answer; he swallowed

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his brandy greedily, and went home. The dawn was coming on; a soft, bright, tender morning in October, the brightness made mild by the sweet melancholy of the season. Jethro went upstairs to his little room looking on the street; he lay down in his clothes, and he slept a long time. He was dreaming of his daughter, of her coming back to him, of her greatness and splendour, and her love for him. She was coming, he dreamed, to rescue him from his sad, lonely life. She was coming with music and attendants, with friends on horseback and in carriages, just as fair Inez, whom he loved to read of and to quote, went down to the seashore when she was about to depart. The strains of music growing louder and louder seemed to mingle in his dream. Suddenly he woke up with a start; he gathered himself together, and such senses as he had. There was music. Yes, it was growing louder and louder. She was coming; he had wakened only just in time. He would have been late if he had slept longer; she would have had to come to his door and knock. He would not have been up and across the threshold to welcome her.

He ran to the window. Yes, there was a long procession coming down the street. There was music; the clangour of cymbals, the heavy throb of the drum; the shrill fifes. There was shouting and cheering; the street was thronged with people. He could just see that there were horses in the procession, and that there were gorgeous carriages. Yes, this was his daughter's coming home; he never felt a doubt about it; never questioned himself. He knew it; this was she; at last, at last, she had come.

He ran downstairs, and opened his door, and stood just outside the threshold ready to welcome her. The people hardly noticed or saw him, so intent were they on gazing at the procession. He was for once rather sorry not to be noticed; they ought to see him in the hour of his pride who had seen him so long and so often in his solitude and poverty. Never had he seen such a procession; there were camels, there was an elephant. Could his daughter be an Eastern queen, the wife of some great Asiatic sovereign? Why not? Such things had been. He would soon know, he thought in exultation. Now came riders; brilliant cavaliers and splendid ladies. They passed him two and two; he thought the line would never cease; and yet he was conscious, too, that this was but his own impatience, for there were not many couples. At length he saw a carriage drawn by four white horses, and in the carriage a lady who stood erect and princess-like glittering in gorgeous array, and with much silver about her whereon the sunlight flashed. He could see her clearly above the crowd, and now he saw her face and he gave a wild cry of rapture.

"She is come—my love, my dove, my beautiful, my undefiled!" screamed the poor half-crazy man, and he burst his way through the crowd, and ran up to the side of the carriage. "My daughter, my daughter!" he called to her, and he laid his lean skinny hand on the side of the carriage. The woman who stood in the carriage

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wore a long garment of gorgeous red, white, and blue, and she had a silvered breastplate, and a shield, and on her head a silvered helmet. She was, in fact, got up to represent the popular idea of Britannia. She was no longer young. Her face had been handsome, but was worn and was raddled with stage-painting. Hearing the old man's shriek she looked down at him, first with wonderment and then with a growing recognition, still doubtful and amazed. There was confusion for a moment; the poor old man tried to get into the carriage; the attendants, thinking him a drunken madman, tried to drag him away; one of the postilions on the horses struck back at him with his whip. The crowd then recognized Jethro Merridew, and, beginning to understand how his craze was working on him, shouted and cheered with delight. Why, this was better fun than even the procession, and the elephant and camels! Here was old Merridew gone raving mad at last, and taking a painted circus woman for his daughter and a grand lady! Laughter made the welkin ring.

"Take care of the poor old gentleman; don't 'urt him," said Britannia pityingly; and remarked to an attendant nymph, "Well, if I don't believe it is my poor old father!"

Jethro was, after all, but mad north-north-west. He was shaken in mind, indeed, but he was not a mere lunatic. He had been sleeping a heavy sleep induced by the effects of brandy, unusual to him. He had been dreaming of his daughter's splendid return with music and cavalcade; he woke, or half-woke, to the sound of music; he heard the trampling of horses; he saw a procession with cavaliers and dames in it, and then, in a splendid carriage, he recognized his daughter. What wonder if all this fitted in with his dream, and seemed only the dream become reality? But now as he clung to the carriage and gazed eagerly at his recovered daughter, and as his senses, such as they were, began to clear, he could not help seeing in his mind what his eyes told him; he could not but see the paint on the face; the black lines round the eyes; the made-up eyebrows; the woman's figure grown heavy and elderly; the tawdry dress; the spangles; the Britannia get-up; the silvered tin of the shield and helmet. It was his daughter—oh yes, indeed! He had found her. She had come back; not to him, not seeking him; and she had come back with paint on her cheeks, and spangles and tin on her robes; she had come back in a Merry-Andrew procession, a circus-riding woman.

He fell back from the carriage and among the crowd. He was dazed; he was crushed in spirit. He cared nothing for the jeering mob. He cared nothing if he were to be trampled on by the horses. He might have been trampled on as he staggered away but for the prompt and energetic assistance of Christian Pilgrim. Pilgrim had been out—not, indeed, to look at the procession, for he had an utter contempt for all manner of shows; but he had been caught in its stream and wave, and was submitting very unwillingly to be dragged along as a captive of the fair Britannia and her train, when

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his eyes were attracted by the sight of poor old Jethro struggling to reach the car. Pilgrim had not the least idea of what Jethro was trying to do, but he felt sure that the poor old man was likely to make a display of himself in some more or less ridiculous way, and perhaps to become a sport to the very pitiless merriment of the Fitzurseham mob. He caught bewildered Merridew in his strong arms and forced a way through the crowd.

"What's the matter with the old fool?" a man asked of Pilgrim as they were making their way.

Pilgrim's only answer was to elbow the man aside, and to hasten with his poor old companion towards Merridew's house.

"Oh, don't you know?" he heard some one else reply to the questioner whom he had thus roughly put away, "Old Merridew's gone clean off his 'ead, and he's taken a circus woman for his daughter."

That told Pilgrim what he had not known before; all he wanted to know.

"Shall we go home, Jethro?" he asked in a voice of compassion.

"Yes; I am better at home. I don't want to go out any more. I think I must have been going crazy, Pilgrim; I am like King Lear in the play. It was my Cordelia, though. It was my daughter, Pilgrim." He did not call him "fair cousin" any more. "She is not young, and she is a poor circus-rider; but she is my daughter all the same, and I think she knew her poor old father. I was foolish to make such an exhibition of myself and of her. I think I must have been out of my right mind, Pilgrim, lately; I suppose the people laughed at me."

"It doesn't matter," Christian said, "you have found your daughter, Jethro; that's something. You had better go in now."

"Yes, it is something. To think of all the years and years and years I have been expecting her and believing that she was to come to me a splendid, happy lady! I don't know how I ever got such a thought into my head, but it always seemed to me like a revelation from heaven. I'll go in and I'll stay in, until she comes. She will come, don't you think?"

"She will come, I am sure; I will go and find her out when all this fuss is over, and tell her where you are."

By this time they were at Jethro's door. The crowd in the street were again absorbed in the successive wonders of the procession, and had forgotten all about the foolish, fond old man. The Fitzurseham crowd was a prudent and a practical crowd in its quest for amusement; and even if it had still been thinking of Jethro, it would have remembered that he was there at hand to be made fun of any day, but that an elephant and camels and a procession of splendid cavaliers and dames were a rare visitation in that place. The crowd would, therefore, have reserved Jethro, and devoted itself just then to the too fleeting delights of the procession.

Pilgrim saw Jethro safely into his room, and talked a little with

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him. He had not found the old man so reasonable in mind and manner for years and years. The shock and the disappointment seemed to have brought back his wandering senses. He was sane, and utterly despondent.

"Isn't there something, Pilgrim, in one of the classic poets about a man being cured of some delusion and made sane, and being only miserable because he was sane?" Jethro suddenly asked.

"Is there? Very likely," Pilgrim said.

"Well, I'm like that man."

These were the last words Pilgrim ever heard him speak. As the old man said them he was stretching himself down on his bed, still quite dressed, and with his face turned away from the window through which he had seen the first glimpse of the procession, and from the mild autumnal sunlight. His face shewed like a mask of grey wax as Pilgrim looked on it before he left the room. It was late in the evening when Pilgrim found the long-lost daughter. He found her a prematurely decayed, not unkindly wreck of a dissipated woman. She said she would go and see her father as soon as ever she could. She went an hour or two later and knocked at the door, but got no answer. She pushed the door, found it unfastened, went in, and ranged the poor little wretched rooms. At last, mounting the stairs, she came to her father's bedroom door, and found him lying dead!

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LAST CHANCE.

The festivities at Fitzurse House went on all the same, although Jethro Merridew could have no part in them. "Merry was the world, though he was dead," writes Mr. Morris of a somewhat more interesting figure than poor Jethro Merridew; and it would take the world of Fitzurseham very little time indeed to get over its feeling of grief at the loss of Jethro Merridew. But it is only just to say that Mrs. Pollen and most of her guests knew nothing of the old man's death until the night's revelries were well-nigh over, and by that time some of them at least had other things to think of.

The gardens were starred with coloured lamps. The newest devices of South Kensington pageantry made the waters of the fountain leap up in many-tinted radiance to the dark of the evening skies, and filled the hearts of Fitzurseham youth, and likewise, indeed, Fitzurseham old age, with wonder and ecstasy. The night was so fine and warm for the time of the year that many were induced to come from the crowded and heated rooms into the cool, pure air, and so the coloured fountains had plenty of admirers. Nothing could be a sadder and a vainer spectacle in its way than a coloured fountain displaying all its prodigality of tints and its high-soaring jets of activity with no one to look on and admire. The

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coloured fountains of Fitzurse House were spared that humiliation by the singular fineness of the night.

Mrs. Pollen received her guests in the great drawing-room on the ground floor. She was dressed very plainly this night, and made little display of jewellery. She was very proud of the fact that she now knew all her company by sight, and could address every Fitzursehamite who came by his or her name, and make some appropriate inquiry. The room was already beginning to be crowded. Romont, in his character of Albanian Joseph, hung about a little in the background, but yet in ostensible attendance on Mrs. Pollen, and occasionally summoned to her side by a signal from her fan, and bidden to do this or that for her. Suddenly he drew back and all but concealed himself in a crowd of admiring, and yet shrinking, Fitzursehamites, some of whom looked on Albanian Joseph as a sort of creature hardly less wondrous and out of their way than a ghost. Romont drew back and was trying to conceal himself because he saw Camiola come in, and he did not like to be seen by her just then, and in his Albanian masquerade, which he feared would bring unpleasant recollections back to her mind. Camiola had chosen a richer and more matronly style of dress than she usually affected. Mrs. Pollen had asked her to dress herself particularly nicely for the pleasure of the Fitzursehamites, and Camiola, like a good girl, did as she was told. Her robe of old-fashioned brocade, in the nondescript colouring of which all shades of yellow and brown seemed to blend agreeably, fell in straight folds round her form, and had a severe simplicity which was in keeping with her somewhat grave mien and the erect carriage of her head. She held a great round fan of yellow and brown ostrich feathers, which might have been borne by one of the stately dames who had in old times crowded the slippery staircase of Fitzurse House. Golden brown plumes nestled in her bodice, confined by a quaint ornament of topaz and pearl, and there were topazes in her brown hair and round her girlish neck. She might, except for her warm and healthy vitality, have been one of the beautiful shadows of an old time with whom Mrs. Pollen's imagination used once to people the rooms. So Mrs. Pollen, too, was thinking, and suddenly she saw that Christian Pilgrim, who was acting generally as a sort of major-domo, was gazing at the girl with a look of intense admiration and melancholy, as if some thought of the same kind were passing through his mind. Somebody stopped Camiola and spoke to her; it was Vinnie Lammas. The contrast was curious; the rich dress, the healthy, vigorous beauty, the splendour of movement as well as of adornment of the one girl, and the pale, distressful look of the other, with her neat but somewhat shabby get-up, and her aspect of unsuitability with the place and the crowd. The contrast was perhaps the more striking because Vinnie was looking very pretty and picturesque in her way. Poor Pilgrim looked sadly at them both; he was even more pallid than usual. Mrs. Pollen felt that something was wrong

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with him. She called Romont to her, and, in a low tone, asked him to look after Pilgrim, to get into talk with him, and find if anything was wrong. Romont promised, and as he was going away turned back just for a moment. They had been speaking up to this time in the semi-Italian jargon which they used on such occasions.

"Doesn't she look lovely to-night, my queen-girl?" he whispered in English, his head bent in Joseph's habitual attitude of deference.

"Young man," Mrs. Pollen responded, "do you think I am in the habit of conversing with menials on the personal charms of the young ladies I receive in my house? Have you spoken to her?" she whispered.

"Not yet. I haven't had the chance. Must it be done while I am in this mummer's costume?"

"It must. That is my idea altogether. You have a better right to speak to her in that mummer's costume, as you call it, than in any other. It was in that you found her out."

"I believe you are right," he said.

"Thank you; I am always right."

The Rector and Lady Letitia had already come and were mingling with the guests: he awkward and shy; she doing her very best, and apparently with much success, to hide for the moment the varied feelings of her heart, perturbed by mingled sorrow, joy, and anxiety. Would Janette come? Yes; Janette actually had come. She was very pale, and looked singularly pretty, and the effort she was making to throw her soul into the business of the evening gave a sparkle to her eyes which was like the light of pleasure for those who are not quick in seeing any difference between one light and another.

Camiola had been miserably unhappy all day. She began to look forward more and more with dread and shame to the prospect of marriage with Georgie Lisle. If she went out to Egypt, she knew it must be; and now they were going to Egypt. The keen strain of anxiety about Georgie's life was over; every one said the campaign was virtually at an end. He was safe, he would soon be in civilized Cairo again. He was a hero; why should she any longer be compelled to go near him? Had he not enough now? How absurdly inconsistent this all was, to be sure! To promise a man that she would marry him if he should escape alive out of the danger, and then to think that she ought to be released from her promise because that very condition had been fulfilled and he had escaped out of the danger—surely a less intelligent girl than Camiola must have seen the utter inconsistency and absurdity of such conduct. Exactly, and Camiola did see it, but she could not make things any different. She could not make her feelings at the present hour the same as they were in those moments of prostration and despondency, when she was ready to promise anything rather than see her dear Lady Letitia in grief. We do not ask our right-minded readers to forgive Camiola; we readily admit that she

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ought to have been ever so much wiser, that she ought to have always known her own mind, that she ought, under no matter what distracting conditions and distressing mental conflicts, to have always done, said, and thought the right thing. But then this is a story about a girl who did not always say and do the right thing, whose heart and head did not always work quite well and harmoniously together, a girl who sometimes made mistakes and had to be sorry for them, a very human sort of girl, just a woman and a sister.

Among her many inconsistencies of mind and purpose was that of which she was distinctly conscious in going to this festival at Fitzurse House. She dreaded, positively dreaded, meeting Romont there; and yet at moments she felt that she would give her life just to see him for once; and there. "Must I lose him?" she kept incessantly asking of herself; sometimes varying the mental inquiry by asking of herself, "If I do see him what shall I do?" The place seemed fateful to her. It was there—out among those paths, under those trees which she could see through the open windows—it was there that the truth was suddenly borne in upon her that she loved him. It was the very appeal made to her love by Georgie Lisle that shot into her heart of heart the conviction that she loved Romont. Suppose he should not come, would that mean that he had steeled his mind to the knowledge that they had better not meet, and that all was over between them? And she not merely loved him, but she knew he was just the man she could love and ought to love; the man she could look up to; whose purposes she could share. She had been hearing much about him lately in an indirect, scrappy sort of way, in little sentences casually—as she supposed casually—let drop by Mrs. Pollen; in stray talks between Mr. Lisle and his wife. She knew of the brave, persistent efforts he had been making to do good for others; for others of whom he knew next to nothing but that they were poor and in distress. If she could have been a man, this is just the sort of man she could have wished to be; this is the man she could love; the man she would have if she could for her lover and her husband. And she might have had him for her lover and her husband if only she had not been so foolish, if only she had not been so weak, if only she had known her own mind at the right time. No—that was not it; it was worse than that; for she did know her own mind; she knew it from the first moment of discovering her love; she knew that she wanted to marry Romont; but she allowed herself to be led away from the knowledge which ought to have been her light and her guide.

She was a fearless, unaffected girl; never shy; yet this night she went through the rooms with a sort of frightened look in her eyes, as if she feared something about to happen. She sometimes shook her head slowly, languidly, from side to side, as one who says, "It is all over; I can't help it now." Mrs. Pollen noted even the slightest and most passing of these little signals of distress; and

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she was not ill-pleased. She wanted the girl to be in a strain of emotional temper that night; to be susceptible, to be impressionable, to be startled out of conventional moods and left open to the promptings of her own soul.

"Camiola, my dear," Mrs. Pollen said in a low tone, "will you go into the music-room and tell me if everything is right there? It isn't open to the people yet; and I want the benefit of your last glance over its arrangements."

Then Mrs. Pollen saw Walter Fitzurse come in. He was dressed very well, and looked decidedly handsome and striking, with a sort of picturesquely penitential air about him which Mrs. Pollen hoped would tell upon Janette. He passed Camiola as she was leaving the room, and made her a low bow, a sort of deprecating, beseeching bow. "Quite the play-actor mood," Mrs. Pollen said to herself with a misgiving, for she felt sure that utter sincerity would be his best chance with Janette.

He came towards Mrs. Pollen, and she received him with ostentatious friendliness of manner, for she knew that every one would observe them, and she felt that if he was to have a chance at all it must be a good and full chance. "Your wife is here; go to her and speak to her; she won't make a scene. Ask her to let you talk to her in some other room. Do it quietly, and don't be afraid." Mrs. Pollen said this in a very low tone as she gave him her hand.

What might have happened if he had gone straight to Janette that moment no one can ever know. Very likely the child's heart might have given way at the sight of him, her lover, her husband; and she might have taken him back to her love and her heart, and all might have been well even then. But no such chance was given by Walter Fitzurse to himself. He looked towards Janette. She was with her father and mother; her face in its present repose looked sad and thin and wasted; he was angry with her for looking unhappy; he was angry with her because the very sight of her made him feel remorseful and ashamed; he was afraid of her and of her father and mother; he lost nerve, he lost courage, he was conscience-stricken; and yet his conscience-stricken condition prevented him from doing the one thing which conscience would have bidden him to do. He quailed; he sickened. He was taken with a demoralizing dread of a scene; he hesitated, faltered; and at that moment of ominous indecision his eyes rested on Vinnie Lammas. Then his good genius deserted him once for all. His memory and mind went back to the days of his love-making with Vinnie Lammas; he thought of her as the one woman who was not ashamed of him; the girl who had been proud of his love and his attentions; the girl whom he might have married without sham or pretence or pitiful scheme of any kind, and who would have looked up to him, adored him, worshipped him, when they were married. The moment was fatal to him. Vinnie was seated; there was a vacant place beside her. He sat down and entered

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into low and rapid talk with her. Janette saw this, and a tremor came over her face. Her mother saw it; Mrs. Pollen saw it; Christian Pilgrim saw it. What could have possessed him? Such a thing done just then and there was an insult and an outrage. "It is all up," Mrs. Pollen said to herself; "he has had his last chance and has thrown it away. Never again will I help him to regain his wife and his career. He is gone—let him go."

Presently the few who were watching this little scene saw Vinnie get up hastily and leave her place. So abrupt was her rising that the least observant who had noticed the matter at all must have seen that something had happened. What had happened? This. Walter, in his almost hysterical mood, had told her that he loved her still and her only; that his life was ruined; that he had been left by his wife for ever; that he had in all the world no one but Vinnie to care for him; that he knew she still did care for him, and he besought her to go away with him to America, where they could begin a new life and be happy together in a relationship which would be a real marriage—not a false and hollow social sham like that in which he was linked with Janette. Every one has heard or read of this sort of thing; it might, as Mrs. Pollen once said, have been printed and sold as a circular, suitable to such men and purposes and occasions. Then Vinnie got up with flushed cheeks and choking throat, and left him without a word.

As she was going out she passed Pilgrim, who came after her and caught her by the arm.

"He has been making love to you?" were Pilgrim's first words. "Don't dare to deny it."

"Oh, what does it matter what he does?" the girl answered distractedly. "He must be going mad, I think. O God forgive him!"

Pilgrim let her go and turned back into the room, and watched every movement of Walter's with burning eyes. He saw Walter get up and lounge vacuously about the room for a moment or two. Then Walter turned to that end of the room where Janette had been, and where she was now standing almost alone, her father and mother having been drawn into talk with others different ways. Was he going to speak to her? Apparently. Janette looked towards him, and saw his purpose, perhaps. She turned away, and going to her father put her hand on his arm as if to claim his protection, and said a word to him, and they passed out of the room together. Then Walter lingered for a little and spoke to this person and to that; and then he too left the room, and Pilgrim followed him, keeping him in sight from room to room, from corridor to hall, and so into the grounds and out at the gate. Mrs. Pollen, while chatting incessantly with some of her guests, lost nothing of all this. She knew what was happening, what had happened, as well as if she had heard each story from the lips of those concerned. She began to look anxiously round as if seeking some

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one, and after a moment or two of much mental uneasiness she saw Romont and signalled to him.

"Something has been going on," she said. "See after Pilgrim; he has followed that wretched creature, Fitzurse; there will be a quarrel of some sort. Don't lose a moment. Go."

Romont was not a man to lose a moment. He asked no question but went. Just then Camiola came to Mrs. Pollen.

"I have seen to the music-room," she said; "everything looks as well as could be. I think everything is going right, in that way."

"In that way," Mrs. Pollen answered. "Yes, in that way. But in other ways, my dear Camiola, I think all is not going right."

"Has something happened?" Camiola asked, with sudden vague misgiving and alarm.

"Something has happened; something is going to happen, I am afraid. I have sent Romont to prevent harm if he can."

"Oh, why did you send *him*?"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I CAN DIE ALONE."

When Walter got out of the grounds, he wandered, dragged himself along with slow, uncertain, unsteady steps in the direction of the old church. He had no purpose of any kind; he was not thinking of going to the church until he saw himself near it, until its spire came between him and the clear starry sky. Then he saw, too, that a faint light shone from one of the windows. There was something unnatural and mysterious, something that hinted of spectral presences and influences, in that faint light coming from the church windows at that unwonted hour. He took out his watch, and was able, by holding it close to his eyes, to make out that it wanted but a few minutes of eleven o'clock. He would go into the church, he thought; in his present mood the sight of anything beyond the common and the natural would be welcome to him. It seemed to him that it would be well if he could go into the gallery on the left as one enters the church, the gallery on the wall of which is the monument to the great man whom he was still pleased to regard as the historic chief of his house. He thought he should like to lie beneath that monument and die there.

He got over the wall and into the churchyard. The sound of the water flowing beneath the wall came with a melancholy cadence into the thoughts of the ruined young man. One of the doors of the church was open, and Walter went in. There was no ghost to be seen there; nor ghost nor living creature; yet a light was burning, and in the gallery which he meant to reach. That one light, a jet of gas half turned on, made the darkness of the other places seem unearthly and appalling. One would naturally long to get within the shelter and protection of that single ray of light. Walter

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crept with the softest tread up to the gallery, and stood alone beneath the historic monument. This egotistic dreamer of sick dreams fancied himself for the moment some ruined scion of an illustrious house who comes to die beneath the trophy of his greatest ancestor.

Thus far he was alone in the church. He did not now trouble himself to think about the reason for the light burning and the open door. The reason was very simple. There was some work of cleaning which had to be done that night, and which had to be put off until then; it concerned the gallery with the monument, and the old woman who kept the keys and lived in a cottage near was up and doing and superintending the business. She and her girl-assistant had merely gone back to her cottage for a moment to gladden and strengthen themselves with a good cup of tea, and naturally left the light burning and the door open, not thinking of the slightest possibility of any sane Fitzursehamite or other personage caring to go in. Walter was alone. He leaned his back against the railing of the gallery and was gazing upwards at the marble effigy and inscription on the wall. Once he glanced casually over his shoulder at the pavement of the church beneath; a pavement much made up of the flat tombstones of the dead; and he thought how horrible it would be if he were to fall over and come crash on that stone floor and be killed in that hideous way. He drew away from the railing and nearer to the wall with the historic marble, to which his eyes were upturned.

Suddenly he heard the sound of a quick footfall on the gravel of the churchyard. Some watcher or workman coming back, he thought; and he roused himself from his dreamings and returned into reality. It would be ridiculous to be found there; and yet if any one came in he must disclose himself or run the chance of being left behind and locked up in the church for the night. The sound ceased; but Walter felt sure there was some one in the church; inside the door—below. Then the footfall was heard again. The man—it certainly was a man—was coming in, was coming towards that very gallery, was ascending the lower stairs. What matter? Walter was doing no harm, and could easily explain that he had come in out of mere curiosity, seeing the light. At the foot of the higher stairs leading directly up to the gallery the new-comer stopped, and Walter heard him lock and bolt the door behind him. He, then, and this new-comer were locked and bolted in together in this gallery; the locked door on one side, the depth from the gallery to the stone floor beneath on the other. What did it matter? The man would unlock the door and let him out. And yet it felt appalling somehow; and now the man came rushing up the stairs, and Walter drew away to the further end of the gallery, and set his back against the wall, like one who is prepared to defend himself. In another second Christian Pilgrim came tearing along the gallery towards him, with eyes sending out a light like that of the corpse-candle that burns pale on the sea-washed rocks,

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and he clutched Walter in his strong, fierce arms, and gave a laugh of insane triumph.

"Come," he cried; "I have found you at last! I told you I would kill you, and I'll kill you now! No one can get to us now; we are locked in. Come!"

He was dragging the wretched young man to the railing of the gallery, evidently determined to fling him over, down upon the pavement. In another moment Walter would have to die the very death the bare thought of which had just set all his nerves in quivering, shuddering motion. He struggled with all the passionate energy of youth and despair; but he was struggling with a man of far greater physical strength, a man now, as he felt sure, possessed by the demon of insanity. Walter gave vent to his feelings in a shriek of agony; a cry for help where he believed that help there could be none.

"You fool!" Pilgrim said, with a terrible laugh; "if you want to fight for your life you oughtn't to waste your breath! *I* don't care; I want to die. Come with me."

At that moment steps were heard as of one rushing into the church; then a beating and clanging at the gallery door. Walter cried out again. Pilgrim laughed in a low chuckling tone. "Too late now," he said between his teeth. The words went into Walter's very ear. "They can't get at us here." He redoubled his effort to drag Walter away, but the moment's interruption had caused him to relax his grip a little, and Walter was now clinging with both hands to the projecting marble which symbolized the shield of his supposed ancestor. The struggle began all over again with the most savage energy. Pilgrim now knew that he had no time to lose.

Some one ran into the church beneath and gazed up and tried to pierce the gloom and see what was going on. The struggling forms were almost directly between him and the light, and he took in the whole situation in a moment. One quick glance all around told him what he must try to do; the only thing there was to do. Beneath the railings of the gallery and not far inside it, although far below it, stood the pulpit. The pulpit was almost directly in front of one of the pillars—narrow wooden pillars they were, which supported the gallery. Above the pillars came the gallery; that is to say, the pillars did not rise outside the rails, but ceased where the rails began. Still, if a man could reach from the pulpit to the pillar, and could shin up the pillar, he might by a sudden and venturous effort succeed in flinging himself out so as to catch at one of the rails. With one such grasp the rest would be easy work. In much less than the time it has taken to put this into writing the man had sprung into the pulpit, leaped like a cat from the pulpit to the pillar, climbed up the pillar hand over hand, then with a desperate spring and a clutch upwards had succeeded in getting hold of one of the rails, and in another second was with the two fighting creatures in the gallery. Walter was breaking into a

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cry of relief when his eyes, dazed and startled as they were, could see that his supposed rescuer was Joseph, the Albanian; and then he remembered his dream, and believed that Joseph, too, had come as his enemy, and he thought that all was over, and closed his eyes and gave up the struggle.

Pilgrim had succeeded in dragging Walter away from his grasp of the monument, and was backing towards the edge of the railings with his wretched prisoner in his gripe. Romont promptly thrust himself between the two struggling men and the rails, and he caught Walter round the waist. His own back was squeezed hard against the rails. Even in this moment the sort of good-humoured coolness which was his characteristic did not desert him. "If only this railing holds," he thought, "we shall do well enough." But he already felt the rails bending and creaking; they would never hold out long.

"Pilgrim, my good fellow," he asked in a low, quiet tone, for he assumed he had to deal with a madman, "don't you see that you will have us all over and down on the pavement in another second? Good heavens, Fitzurse, have you no strength at all; can't you help yourself one little bit?"

Walter was hopeless. The voice of Romont speaking, as it seemed to him, out of the lips of Albanian Joseph was too much for him. His head swam round, his limbs relaxed; he fainted in Romont's arms and hung down limp as a dead body. Pilgrim was still holding his grip, but he was no longer crushing against the rails. He had sense enough to understand Romont's words and to keep from injuring him. His strength was terrible, but Romont braced himself up for one last effort, and literally tore the swooning body free of Pilgrim's clutch. At the time Romont did not fully understand Pilgrim's purpose. He believed that Pilgrim only meant to kill Fitzurse. Afterwards it dawned on him, and by degrees became clear, that Pilgrim meant to die with his victim. Now, when he had torn Fitzurse free, he made no attempt to restrain Pilgrim. He had no time; he did not think of it; he could not have done it if he had to care for Fitzurse. He was stretching Fitzurse on the floor, and meant then to appeal to Pilgrim, and try to calm him and get to know what it was all about.

Pilgrim gave him no chance. With a wild cry, "Save him, then, if you want to save him—I can die alone!" he flung himself heavily against the frail railings. Some of them gave way; there was a plunge forward; Romont heard another cry, this time inarticulate, and then a crash on the pavement below, followed by such a succession of echoes that one might have thought for the moment all earth's caverns were in succession breaking into tumultuous applause over the deed which had just been done. The dust flew in clouds; the rats were heard to scamper affrighted among stools and seats; some dog in a barge on the river answered to the noise in the church with a prolonged howl which might have seemed the death-wail over the man who lay killed on the pavement.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

"I SEE ALL."

THERE is a striking passage in "Philip van Artevelde" which tells of the mysterious manner in which, "when this or that has chanced, the smoke outruns the flash"—the news gets to our ears almost in anticipation of the event. The old church by the river had hardly ceased to echo to the crash of Pilgrim's fall when, somehow or other, a shuddering sensation seemed to go through Mrs. Pollen's whole frame, and the words almost rose to her lips that something terrible had happened. Soon the story began to take shape. Somebody had just arrived, it seemed, who, passing by the churchyard, had seen light within, and while still on his way to Fitzurse House heard a noise which, to his startled imagination, seemed like the thunder itself. This story was first told in definite manner to Mr. Lisle, who was always quiet and prudent whenever anything had to be done. He went to Mrs. Pollen and said a word or two to the effect that he feared something had fallen in the church, and he had better go and see about it. At the time he had no thought of anything but some mere accident to masonry; some falling of part of a roof or other such comparatively trivial thing; but Mrs. Pollen well knew that if anything had happened it was more than that.

"Take some people with you; take some men," she said quietly. She would have kept her nerves if she were told that the end of the world was to come next moment. "I fancy something bad has happened; be prepared for anything." In her heart she was only thinking, "if anything should have happened to Bertie Romont, and it was I who sent him, and *she* asked me why did I send him! I must get her out of the way for the present—anyhow, until we know something." She looked about, and at last saw Camiola the centre of a circle of children, to whom she was telling stories.

"Camiola dear," she said, "I want the music-room cleared. I have a particular reason. There is a little effect which I have had in preparation for some time, and I must get the music-room all to ourselves for a few moments to manage it. Now, will you just go and see that it is cleared out? You can tell them why, as far as you know; but get it done, dear, will you? Just go about among them and tell them, and I will come to you as soon as it is quite empty and tell you what I want you to do next."

What Mrs. Pollen thought was this: "No news will have reached the people in the music-room yet. It is barred against all outsiders, and no rumours will have found their way in there yet from this side. If Romont is safe, he will come back here at once, and he will enter the music-room by the use of the key, so as not to be seen coming in, and to be able to tell us quietly all. Then

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he will see her. The first thing she will know of the whole affair is that he is safe."

Camiola thought there was something rather odd and mysterious about this request of Mrs. Pollen's. She could not take it quite literally; she could not altogether believe that it meant just what it said, and no more. She could not help thinking that it must have something to do with the disappearance of Walter Fitzurse and Pilgrim, and the mission of Romont to look after them, and her nerves began to quiver. But she had long learned to have so much faith in Mrs. Pollen as to believe it was best to do, without question, what her eccentric friend desired to have done. So she submitted.

"Oh yes," she said, with a tremulous lip, "I will go, since you wish it."

"Yes, dear, I wish it." So Mrs. Pollen said, willing to risk all rather than have some wild, extravagant story shot suddenly into the girl's ears; and Camiola went upon her curious errand with a sinking heart boding of ill.

She succeeded in getting the people quietly out of the music-room, the general opinion being that something was to happen afterwards in connection with semi-darkness and a magic lantern, and that it would be well not to wander away too far from the door, the inner door, of the music-room, lest the news of this great treat should get abroad over the whole company, and the whole company accordingly swarm to the centre of attraction.

Camiola at last found herself alone in the music-room, and she assumed that she was to stay there until Mrs. Pollen came. It was very lonely. The softened lights had in them something subdued and melancholy; the place seemed like a great chamber of the dead with funeral lamps burning. No doubt it was the contrast between the crowded and noisy condition of the room a few moments ago and its loneliness now that put such a feeling into Camiola's mind; that contrast and the disturbed state of her own nerves and her own heart. She felt utterly depressed and out of courage. The future looked all blank and darksome to her. She was becoming miserably conscious that she had committed herself to a cruel mistake when she once again succumbed to the supposed desire of Lady Letitia and consented to marry Georgie. She was growing to be entirely ashamed of the part she had played, and she began to torment herself with the thought that Romont, too, must despise her now for what she had done, and that he cared nothing more for her. Everything had gone wrong with her, she thought, since that first night in Fitzurse House when she found out that she was in love with him. Only now, when Mrs. Pollen spoke to her, did she learn that Romont had been in Fitzurse House this evening, this very night; and he had not sought her out, had not come near her; evidently did not intend to come near her. And now he was in danger of some kind, some vague undefined danger; and suppose she should never see him again, should never be able to explain or

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excuse herself to him, should never have a chance of making him believe; that, however inconsistently or wrongly she had acted, she had loved him all the time, and had known that she loved him?

These thoughts filled her mind and blended very sadly indeed with the sounds of the festivity that was going on so near. The music and the noise of talk irritated and jarred upon her nerves. The solitude of the room became unbearable. "I will not stay here any longer," she said to herself; "I can't bear it."

Suddenly she heard a rustling on the gravel just outside the door, and then a key turning rapidly in the lock. Not a great many persons had private keys to open that door, and of these few who had, there was one at least whom Camiola would not care to see just then and there. She stood up by the organ waiting, anxious, almost frightened; in the mood of one who knows that something out of the common is about to befall; she stood with one hand resting on the keys of the organ and her eyes intent upon the door. The door opened, and there was an oblong of darkness made for a moment, and then Romont, in the dress of Albanian Joseph, came into the room. He stopped short, seeing her, and she saw that his clothes were torn, and that his face was cut and his hands were wounded.

"There has been bad work," he said quietly, not willing to alarm her, yet anxious to prepare her for grim news. "Poor Pilgrim is dead."

The long crushed-down feeling of the girl rose in a great wave and overwhelmed her, and she ran to him and cried—

"Oh, but *you* are safe; thank God *you* are safe!"

She threw her arms round his neck. The knowledge which she vaguely had that there was danger, and that he was in it; that he would be sure to go far into it; the solitary nerve-thrilling time in the music-room, his sudden entrance, the blood upon his face and hands, and yet the assurance that he was safe—all these influences were too much for her, and beat down her self-control, and she had thrown her arms around his neck before she knew what she was doing; and now that she did know and was endeavouring to draw back she found that he would not let her.

"My sweetest Camiola," he said; and he kissed her again and again, unchecked, it must be owned; "and so you were in alarm for me? How sweet of you; and how happy for me to come on you in this way. Now, of course you won't hesitate any more——"

"Oh no, no; how could I after this?"

He drew a deep breath. "I am so happy; I can't help it. I am so happy, although poor Pilgrim is dead. See, I have stained your beautiful dress."

"It is your blood," she said, with a slight shiver. "You were in such danger, then, and you are hurt?"

"It's nothing; only a few scratches got in trying to save a worthless scoundrel. I am sorry to have stained your dress—but

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let it be a symbol to show that I would shed my heart's blood for you, Camiola. And you really do love me?"

"Oh yes; I loved you from the very first."

Then there was a silent moment of measureless content to both.

"Tell me all that has happened," she said suddenly. "It is a shame for us to think of ourselves at such a time; it is not like you or me."

"Very like me," said Romont. "I couldn't help thinking about you and me—about *us*—if my dearest friend lay dead. Indeed, poor Pilgrim was a very dear friend."

At this moment Mrs. Pollen entered the room.

"You needn't tell me anything just at present," she said; "I have heard all—yes, and I see all."

CHAPTER L.

"MY TWO."

THERE was an inquest; there was a police investigation; the papers were filled for a time with accounts of the Fitzurseham mystery, and the attention of the public was turned to the place in a manner which made the best of its residents very uncomfortable. The ordinary Fitzursehamite, however, was proud of living in a place which had a mystery and a violent death; and was sure to make a boast of the fact that he knew Christian Pilgrim, and that he used to see Walter Fitzurse every day when Fitzurse was quite a boy. For a while the story of Jethro Merridew's sudden death got inextricably mixed up in the public mind with the tragedy in the old church, and indeed some people will never succeed in getting them properly separated. A philosophic person might have found some pleasure and profit from observing an illustration of the growth of the myth evolving itself out of the daily developments of legend concerning the life and death of Jethro Merridew and Christian Pilgrim. One rather popular theory was that Christian was Merridew's son, and consequently the brother of the circus woman; that Walter Fitzurse had made love to her and then abandoned her; that Merridew died of grief at seeing what a wreck she had become; and that Pilgrim tried to kill Walter out of revenge, and, failing in his purpose, endeavoured to escape, and was accidentally killed in the effort.

As far as the more intelligent part of the public were concerned, Romont's evidence made the whole story clear enough. Pilgrim's reason had suddenly deserted him; and Walter Fitzurse's assailant was for the time a mere maniac. From what may be called the Bow Street point of view, Fitzurse was in no wise to be blamed. He was defending himself the best he could, and, but for Romont's intervention, he would have been killed.

The event made a terrible impression upon Fitzurse. For a while his whole nervous system was so shattered that it did not

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seem certain whether his life, or at all events his reason, would not go. He was taken to Fitzurse House and cared for there by Mrs. Pollen. When he was getting a little better Janette came to see him. They had a long interview; no one present, of course, but these two, the husband and the wife. The result told very briefly by Janette was, that they agreed to separate, he to go to the United States and try to make a way for himself there. To do him justice, it was he who insisted upon this. Then, after a time, if their affection for each other seemed to return, they could come together again.

"Something tells me," said Janette, with solemn eyes looking into the eyes of Mrs. Pollen, "that we shall not meet again."

Mrs. Pollen thought, in her secret heart, that it would be just as well if this prophetic warning were to become verified, but she did not say anything of that kind to Janette. "She loves him still—after all," Mrs. Pollen thought. "If there is anything in him he may have a chance even yet."

Meanwhile, the hope was something for Janette to live on, despite her boding; and she was, perhaps, not altogether unhappy. Her sister Alice clung to her now with a plaintive and eager affection, praying for her love—for all her love. "You must give me all your love, Janette; you must, indeed, now that he is gone."

They buried Christian Pilgrim in the old churchyard. His body lies just near one of the paths that lead to the wall overlooking the river. Vinnie Lammas must have trodden on that very earth the night she ran across the churchyard to fling herself into the water. Jethro Merridew sleeps in the churchyard too. His daughter was at his funeral, and comported herself quite decently, people said, considering that she was a circus woman.

To days of excitement succeeded days of reaction and depression for some, at least, of our friends at the rectory. The rectory was for the most part silent as the grave. The journey to Egypt was still talked of; but of course every one knew by this time that Camiola would not go, and Lady Letitia and Janette somehow did not seem as if they had animal spirits enough between them for such an undertaking. The Rector strongly urged it, believing that they both needed to be shaken up, and that the very inconveniences and discomforts of such a journey would do them good. He did not much mind about himself; it was part of his business and his duty to put up with things and not to want to get away from his post.

Mrs. Pollen and Camiola were talking over all this one evening. Camiola stayed now at the rectory and now at Fitzurse House. She had taken almost altogether to Fitzurse House since it had come to be known at the rectory that she would not go to Egypt, and what else that determination on her part implied. Camiola had been pouring out her soul to her friend concerning her love and her happiness; and after a while she went on to say that there

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were some shadows over her happiness too, and that these came out of the general sadness which had settled upon the rectory.

"You see, I am afraid that I am part of it—part of the cause of it."

"Not so far as Janette is concerned."

"Oh no; I didn't mean that. I was thinking of Lady Letitia, and I am still sorry for poor Georgie. I suppose he is unhappy; but I couldn't help that; I couldn't marry him. Why should I? Bertie is all the world to me."

"I always told you so; and you wouldn't believe me. I tell you something else now, Camiola. I am not afraid of hurting your vanity, my dear, for you have hardly any to hurt. I don't believe Georgie will remain long unconsoled."

"Don't you, really? If I only thought that, I should be so glad. Don't you, really? You are almost always right, however you get at things."

"Well, he was always too hysterical for me; I have not much faith in that sort of thing. He was like a child—the more you try to keep him from a thing the more he wants to have it. No, Camiola, he won't die of love for you or any other creature that ever put on a petticoat."

"I wish I might hear of his getting married," Camiola said thoughtfully. "There must be girls who could make him happy and whom he could love. There is a great deal that is lovable in him."

"Is there? I suppose so; I never could quite see it, but I dare say it is so. Well, I haven't the slightest doubt that he will get married very soon—perhaps before you do."

"I hope so," said Camiola, and there the talk ended.

Mrs. Pollen's words might have been taken as prophetic. The very next day Camiola received a line from Lady Letitia enclosing a telegraphic message from Cairo.

"From Georgie; to Lady Letitia Lisle.

"Dearest mother, I have found happiness at last. Am married to a charming, noble-hearted woman, Agnes Clements, widow of Major Clements, who was killed in South Africa. We are devoted to one another. Tell father. We hope you will both be glad."

Mrs. Pollen and Camiola looked at each other for a moment in a sort of bewilderment, and then both at once broke out into a peal of laughter. Their mirth was ringing still when Romont entered the room.

"I wonder who she is?" Camiola said.

"Oh, I know," Mrs. Pollen answered. "I know her very well. She was very pretty; she is a dreadful little flirt."

"*Was* very pretty?"

"Yes; in a sense she is very pretty still."

"Still? Good gracious, how old is she?"

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"Not old at all," Mrs. Pollen said demurely; "I should call her young, in fact. About my age, dear; running rapidly into the forties, I should think; at all events, quite forty. A very nice age, don't you think? If he happens to be rather too young, that's not her fault, you know; she would be younger still if she could, I dare say. I knew her in Cairo. She makes up wonderfully well; you have no idea how nice she looks in evening dress and by lamplight. I should think she would settle down and drop flirtation now that she has got a nice young fellow to marry her. And just to think, Camiola, that you were really going to throw away your youth and your life and your love—to say nothing of Bertie Romont here—on a creature who could be consoled so soon by a woman like that!"

"I don't suppose I ever really could have done it," Camiola said apologetically.

"You never could have done it," Romont said, "because I never would have allowed you to do it; not if I had to carry you off and do the Lochinvar. I never felt very much alarm about it."

"Can she make him happy, I wonder?" Camiola asked.

"I shouldn't wonder," Romont answered. "These regular hack flirts sometimes make very good wives for the sort of men who like them. I shouldn't like them myself, but every man to his taste. Our friend Georgie apparently does."

"It's a good lesson for one's vanity," Camiola observed gravely. "I might have thought he was dying for me."

"Fact is," Mrs. Pollen said, "they don't die."

"Don't they?" Romont asked. "What about poor Pilgrim? I am convinced that love was in one way or another the cause of his death. He went mad, I grant you, but it was love that did it."

"Then I will put it differently," Mrs. Pollen said; "the men one wouldn't mind dying for never die for us."

"I would die for you," Romont said, "if you wanted me to; and if Camiola would give me leave."

"But she wouldn't, and you know it; and that sort of dying is easily done. I feel very sad about poor Pilgrim all the same."

The journey to Egypt was of course given up now. Lady Letitia felt no very passionate longing to see her son's new wife. The campaign was all over, and Georgie would probably soon come home. Lady Letitia felt wretched over the whole affair, and perhaps could not quite keep from secretly blaming Camiola because she had not married Georgie at once and out of hand, and so prevented all possibility of his ever marrying the fading widow.

"Our only hope must be that she will not fade too soon," said the Rector, with a determined effort to make the best of things, "and that his glamour may continue, so that she may not fade for him. You see, Letitia, he would never have done for a girl like Camiola. Although he is our son, we can't help admitting that, can we?"

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"No; I suppose not. Bertie Romont is certainly much better suited for her——"

"Oh yes, ever so much better——"

"And as it couldn't be our son, St. George, I am very glad it is Kitty Romont's son that is to get her. I positively will go and see Kitty Romont again. Fancy all that has happened since I saw her last!"

It was arranged that the marriage of Romont and Camiola was to take place very soon, and was to be altogether a quiet affair. The married lovers were to go to Italy; the Lisles were to go to a German bath, taking Janette with them; the whole encampment was about to break up; some going off to be happy, others to make the best of things.

The soft, sweet autumn was fading already into a mild winter, and Mrs. Pollen, Camiola, and Romont were standing one afternoon on the lawn of Fitzurse House. The marriage day was coming near; the lovers would soon go away. They were talking over many things, past, present, and to come, with their friend whom shortly they were to leave. Amid all their happiness there was a certain sense of sadness at the thought that they were to part. So many things had happened lately that it did not seem altogether possible for their lives to settle down again into the familiar groves. There were occasional moments of silence.

"I suppose you haven't thought yet," Mrs. Pollen said, "of what you are to do with yourself in the way of a career? What is he to do with himself, Camiola? Is he still to be a professional philanthropist? Is he ever to be Joseph the Albanian again?"

"Oh no," Camiola said hastily, and then suddenly corrected herself. "Yes; I think he shall be Albanian Joseph sometimes, for my exclusive benefit; I think he must wear the mummer's disguise on every anniversary of the day when he rowed us on the river. Don't you remember that day?"

"Yes; I remember," said Mrs. Pollen.

"I think you too must see him on these great anniversaries, Mrs. Pollen. We must have you."

"If I am anywhere near."

"If you are anywhere near?" Camiola asked, surprised. "You don't propose to be very far away?"

"The question is," said Mrs. Pollen, "what I am to do with myself now. I have lost my right-hand man in Christian Pilgrim. I don't like the look of this place while his memory is still fresh upon it. I seem to see the stains of his blood everywhere round. I shall go away for awhile, and travel with Vinnie Lammas, although I am rather sick of travel, and I shall be lonely."

"Come with us," Camiola and Romont exclaimed in one breath, and they really meant it. Mrs. Pollen smiled tenderly on them both and said—

"Come, now, that would be shabby and selfish of me, would not it—to inflict myself on your honeymoon? No, my dear pair of

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happy lovers, I shan't do that. Perhaps I shall ask you to keep this place for me after you get back to England and while I am still thinking things out and not certain what I shall do. You see, I am not quite clear whether, on the whole, I have made a particularly good thing out of my attempt to put matters all to rights in Fitzurseham. I wonder whether Pilgrim might not be alive and Janette Lisle unmarried and Walter Fitzurse still spooning on little Vinnie Lammas, if I had never come near the place? I begin to think I had better leave Providence to manage things for the future and not take on me to intervene."

"If you hadn't come," Camiola said, "what would have happened to us, I wonder—to Bertie and me?"

"Oh, well, I fancy Bertie and you would have come all right anyhow; I am sentimental enough still to believe that when people love like that they are not to be kept asunder. But I don't feel satisfied with the general outcome of my attempt at administration; and indeed, it seems in the world as if the more some of us tried to do good the less we succeed; and we had better just be commonplace and discreet and let things alone. I am an unlucky woman, I think. Well, I'll go away for the present. Perhaps I may come back; although the most graceful and poetic thing would be now to disappear and never be seen here any more; and be always an odd sort of memory or myth in Fitzurseham. Who knows but that I might in time get into a legend and be regarded as a saint or a ghost, or something of the kind? Wouldn't that be better?"

"You are a saint to me—a patron saint!" Romont said.

"Am I really? Well, is not that another reason why I should go away, and stay away, and live on always like that in your memory and in the memory of my handsome Camiola, who is looking so particularly grave just now——"

"I can't bear the thought of your talking of going away," Camiola said, with tears rising in her eyes.

"My dear, you make me very happy—you two," Mrs. Pollen said. "And you make life seem sweet to me; you make me young again. I shall drag but a lengthening chain, you may be sure, at each remove that takes me farther from you. You have done a great deal for me, and whether I am here or whether I am there, near or far, I shall have you with me always in my memory and in my heart, you two; *my* two."

The bold dark eyes were moist as she spoke, and she took a hand of each in hers.

THE END.

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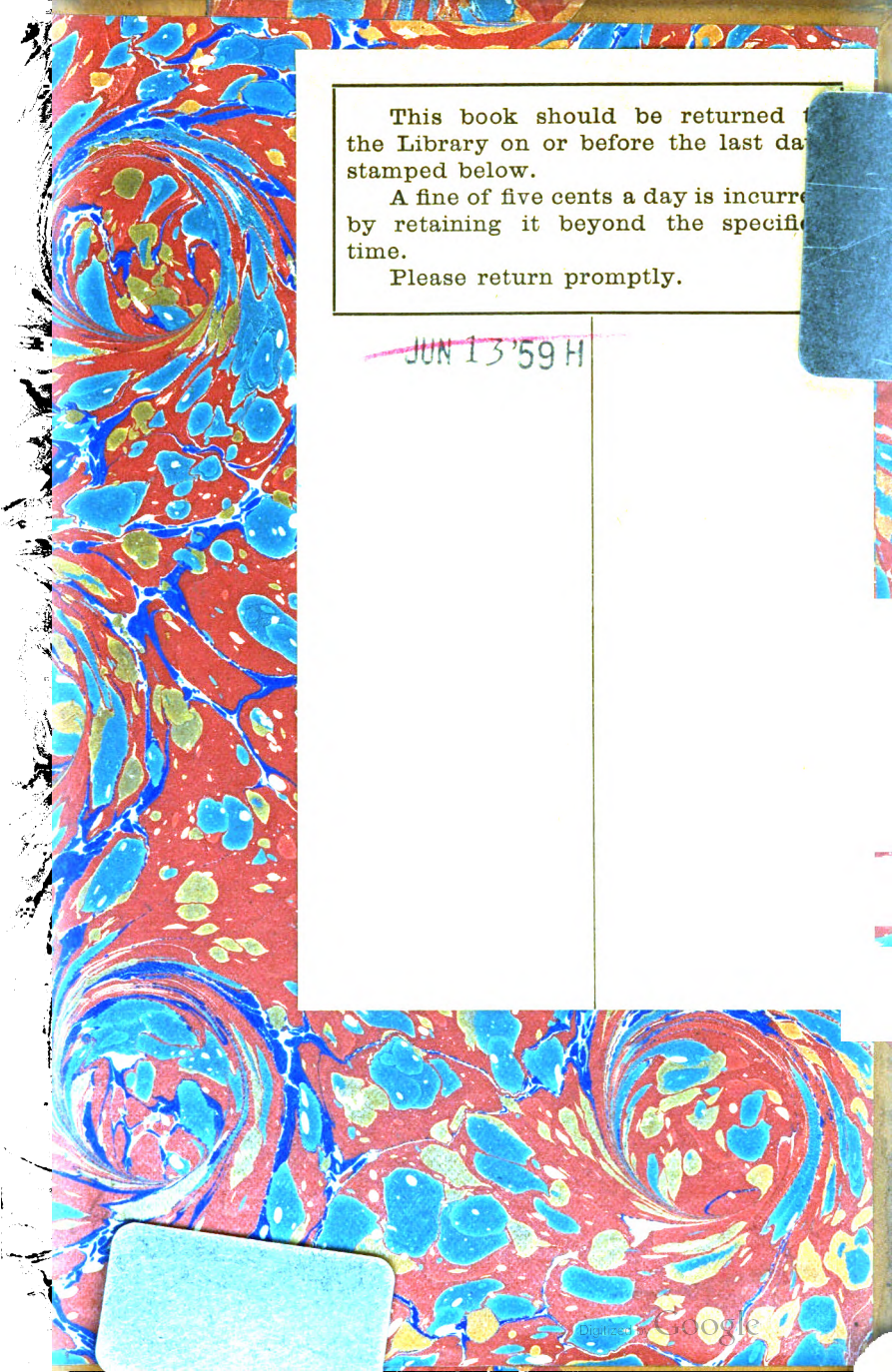

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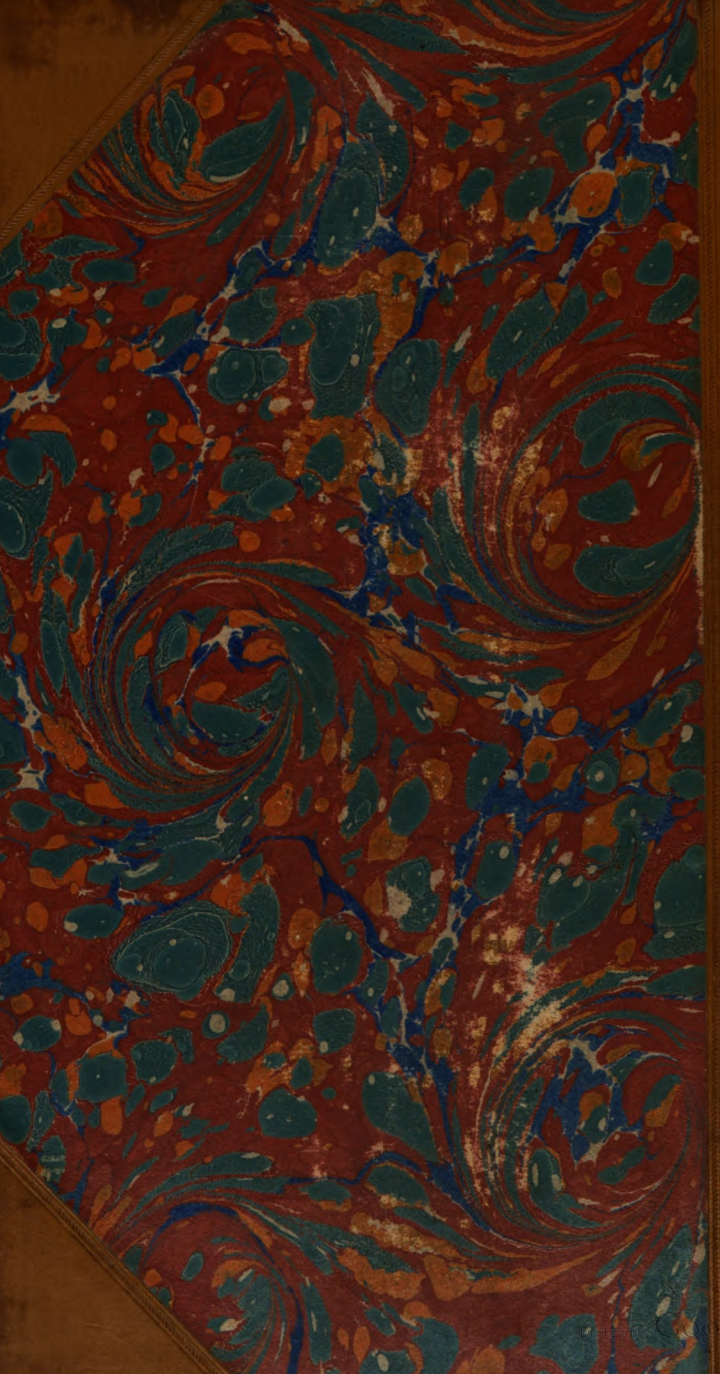
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